

A quieter year?

After last year's efforts and success in thwarting the Abbey Orchard development proposal it was a relief for this year to be a lot less demanding. We continue efforts to improve safety around Romeland, a necessity arising from St Albans School's large bus operation. We also keep an eye on local planning proposals, the state of roads and pavements as well as refuse collections/recycling.

We work with other resident associations, bilaterally on local issues as well as collectively on matters affecting St Albans as a whole, eg local government reorganisation. We work directly with SADC through our place on the City Neighbourhoods Committee, with council officers on specific matters and local councillors on issues that affect us all. Congratulations to Sandy Walkington our local county councillor, who's just been elected Chair of Herts County Council.

John Hedges
Chair, APRA



APRA needs you!

New members and committee members are urgently needed in order to continue APRA's essential work to protect our conservation area. We particularly wish to improve our website <https://apralbans.org/> and our social media presence. Subs are only £6 a year or £10 for joint membership. To join and/or help please contact us at: membership.apra@gmail.com.

APRA 2026 Committee

John Hedges, Chair, Abbey Mill Lane
Kate Buckley, Vice Chair, College Place
Andrew Yaras, Treasurer, Fishpool St
Jacky Stephen, Secretary, Monastery Close
Malcolm Hull, Abbey View Road
Sally Stevenson, Lower Dagnall St

Summer Party Sunday 12 July, from 4:00 to 6:00 pm.

APRA's 2026 summer party will be held in the gardens of Thatched House, Abbey Mill End. The Geoff Dyson Trio will be providing suitably smooth swing! All members are welcome, friends and neighbours too. Just let us know in advance who is likely to be coming, just so we don't run dry!

St Albans School Buses

The school operates a 13-route bus network, delivering over 500 pupils before 8:30 am and collecting them from 4:00 pm and 6:00 pm. This generates 33 daily bus movements, an excessive number of extremely large vehicles for the historic conservation area's narrow streets.

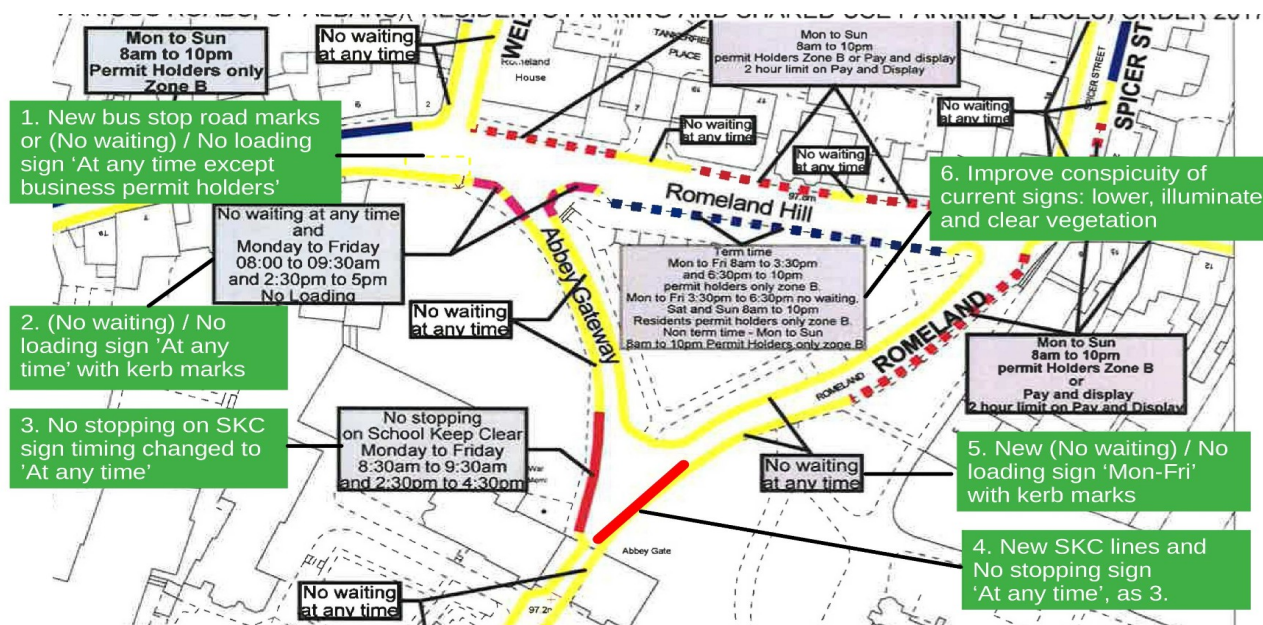
While morning drop-offs (opposite Welclose Street) generally work well, afternoon and evening collections around Romeland present significant logistical challenges. The reserved parking bay has limited capacity and schedules are tight, with five buses leaving at 4:10 pm and eight at 6:05 pm.

Modest but welcome progress - the school has expressed willingness to look at alternative morning drop-off points, with the trial use of the Sumpter Yard bus stop on Holywell Hill. The High St loading bay is also under consideration - local businesses being consulted on the likely impact. However, challenging safety and congestion issues for the afternoon and evening pick-ups remain,

especially on the corner of Abbey Gateway and Fishpool Street, where buses often overhang the corner and obstruct sight lines. This creates hazards for all road users, despite supervision by the school. With so many buses in the afternoon and evening, available parking around Romeland is frequently exceeded, a situation sometimes worsened by cars occupying the bus bays. Consequently, drivers are forced to set down and collect pupils wherever possible. This creates safety hazards for road users and pupils, who necessarily at times board from the road rather than the pavement. Romeland Hill can become completely blocked for 20 mins or more, causing other traffic to detour.



Last autumn, APRA resubmitted six reasonable safety improvement proposals to HCC.



This is our current understanding of progress:

1. Designated Bus Stop (Opposite Welclose St): Accepted in principle by both SAS and HCC. Adding this extra bus space is a practical solution that allows pupils to board directly from the pavement, avoiding the need for pupils to cross or board from the road.
2. Corner Parking Signage: Improved signage to deter bus parking on junction corners.

3. School Keep Clear (SKC) Lines: We are quite reasonably urging the extension of these time limits at the main entrance to at least match the school operating times, 8.30am to 6.30pm. This should be a 'no-brainer' as correct signage is necessary for SKC to be enforceable.
4. SKC Lines (Opposite the main entrance): HCC has dismissed this, oddly because it might benefit other road users. We have asked HCC to reconsider.
5. Stricter parking restrictions, with all signs and lines renewed: to deter unlawful parking.
6. Improved Signage: To encourage unimpeded bus parking, accepted in principle.

Residents are gently reminded that the Romeland Hill parking bay is reserved for the exclusive use of school buses between 3.30 and 6.30pm on term-time weekdays.

While past experiences with HCC have sometimes been very frustrating, we now see some modest signs of progress, particularly where there's a clear benefit to the school. HCC will conduct a formal public consultation for the proposed bus stop modifications (#1 and #6 above). We have asked HCC why APRA's other Romeland safety suggestions (#2 to #6) are not being taken forward, especially #3, which should be non-controversial. We have not had a satisfactory response. We encourage residents to participate and, if so minded, to voice their support once the consultation opens.

In passing, formal consultations are also awaited on the Zone B/C parking review and the c.£1m final implementation proposals for the George St pedestrianisation scheme.

In order to reduce Romeland highway pressures, APRA has also previously suggested that more buses load pupils when parked on school premises, Aquis Court (already used by the school's own mini bus fleet) being an obvious option. However, it appears there is also the possibility that the footway crossover to the school main entrance could be reset, allowing easier access by mini-buses and thus loading in the Upper Yard - so buses would no longer need to park unlawfully by the Abbey Gateway. We understand that HCC would coordinate these works with nearby road repairs. If so, we would expect the classic conservation area footway blue pavements to be replaced.

APRA is committed to fixing local traffic issues and making our roads safer, as it has done since it was formed 13 years ago. After a break in communications with SAS last year, we look forward to the relationship being reset. Community problems are best resolved through community action.

Planning - Abbey Mill Lane

The Cathedral is seeking to build two semi-detached houses in the garden and following the building line of 31 AML, each with a garden and parking space next to the existing garages. The houses will be of the same height as No. 31 and in keeping with Nos. 27- 31.

Nearby residents have concerns with this sizeable development, so Alan Hartwell (Cathedral COO) kindly gave a briefing at last month's APRA social in the Fighting Cocks. Apparently pre-application feedback indicated SADC is minded to give approval, subject to conditions. A planning application for this sensitive site is expected in a month or so – which APRA will monitor.



Parks and Green Spaces

It's been a busy year in Verulamium Park. The new wetland areas at Westminster Lodge and Belle Meadow are maturing, giving a more natural feel. Biodiversity is increasing as a result, with water voles sighted in the park on several occasions. Rewilding the old golf course began over winter with seeding of 3,000 m² of wildflower meadows and the planting of 4,500 shrubs and small trees.

Last year APRA supported the establishment of the Friends of Verulamium Park, which many of our members have joined. The Friends have been actively involved with tasks helping nature to thrive around the park and organising monthly litter picking tasks. Working with English Heritage, there are plans for volunteers to help with conservation work on the Roman walls. More details of up-and-coming events are on their website <https://www.verparkfriends.org/>.

APRA raised objections to increasing the number of large events in the park and the number of event days this year has stayed at 28. Planning applications have been granted for a new temporary athletics pavilion at Westminster Lodge. Consent was also granted for OVO to convert St Germain's Barn, next to the museum, to a new theatre.

At Abbey Orchard, APRA had previously objected to an application from Herts University for construction of temporary buildings for three months each year. This was refused and has not been appealed. Graduation ceremonies have continued to run smoothly.

Waste and Recycling There has been a noticeable increase in waste sacks being ripped and the contents strewn across streets and pavements. Any food waste or packaging with food scraps will attract pests. The best way to deter them is to use a food caddy if you can (available at SADC). Further info at <https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/recycling-and-rubbish>.



Roads and Pavements

Raised and cracked blue pavements, often the result of delivery vans parked on pavements, are a real hazard to pedestrians. Tarmac is often used for a much appreciated quick fix by HCC, but there's a tendency for it to be left in place - unsightly as well as unsuitable for the Conservation Area. APRA will continue to ask for proper re-instatement work, also recently raised by the Civic Society. You can report pavement/pothole problems via <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services>.

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 the River Ver. This newsletter is distributed to over 600 homes and businesses in that area. Please send comments or queries to membership.apra@gmail.com.