



## Welcome to the ABOYNE RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION updated newsletter for JULY 2015

*This newsletter aims to keep our members up to date with any developments, major and minor, that may have an impact on where we live.*

### THE ZIGGURAT BUILDING - URGENT!!

Ziggurat House is the large, modern, glass fronted office building by the station. Except it's no longer an office building. Change of use of the building into flats has recently been permitted - this type of permission is out of the hands of local councillors.

Now the developers are proposing a substantial design change, from the existing glass to a re-clad in brick. It's an ambitious scheme, with far-reaching implications. Huge numbers are involved: over 100 flats in the existing block (with no car parking provision.)

And this is only the first of five similar proposals in this area. We believe these proposals cannot be agreed in isolation - there are huge implications for local infrastructures such as -

- health services
- schools
- roads
- pollution
- traffic

Now we hear that with very little notice - 6 working days, to be precise - the proposal will go to Plans Central on **Monday evening 3rd August at 19:00 pm with a recommendation to approve.**

Planning officers are recommending that permission is granted for this scheme despite over 80 objections. These range from concerns about over-development and insufficient infrastructure to the inappropriateness of the design change. Councillor Simon Grover has been inundated with complaints and describes the proposed new design as shocking. St Albans Civic Society are also objecting. Ziggurat House is uncharacteristically tall but its glass design allows it to blend into the background sky, belittling its bulk. The proposed utilitarian high-rise block would be totally out of keeping with the conservation area.

We believe, alongside other Residents' Associations across central St Albans, that it is quite wrong that a major development of this type, visible across the city, should appear to be rushed though like this. Ridgemont Road RA is calling for this proposal to

be subject to proper scrutiny, along with timely opportunity to challenge, revise and correct the officer's report and recommendations. We wholeheartedly agree.

The ARA has added its voice to the objectors. Those of us who can will also attend the meeting on Monday night. Please join us if you can - it's at the Council Offices, St Peters Street, this Monday August 3 at 19.00.

You can also make your voice heard on this by writing. Address your email or letter to [cllr.j.daly@stalbans.gov.uk](mailto:cllr.j.daly@stalbans.gov.uk) - councillor Julian Daly is Executive Leader and Portfolio Holder for Planning and Conservation in St Albans. If you have time, we also recommend - and indeed, commend - the attached letter by local resident Tom Attree of Ridgemont Road.

## **UPDATE ON THE NEW PLANNING APPLICATION FOR ST CLAIRE'S CARE HOME**

At our most recent ARA meeting, on Tuesday July 21, the main item on the agenda was the planning application from Hightown Housing Association to convert the old St Claire's care home in Church Crescent into 10 self contained one-person flats and provide accommodation for single homeless people in the area.

Earlier that weekend a small group from the ARA met with members of St Claire's Action Group, which was formed last year as a result of the above proposal. The Action Group came together to oppose the Hightown proposal and it sits separately from the ARA, though we share many concerns. Both groups have worked alongside each other, together with local councillors, to pin down the Hightown proposal as much as possible. There is general agreement that the way Hightown has gone about the process has fallen very short. As an organisation it has not inspired confidence, and whatever is finally agreed regarding the use of the old St Claire's building, it is essential that proper management and the right licensing agreement are in place.

(Residents may recall that the poor handling of this proposal led to it being called to the council's Internal Performance Scrutiny Committee. More information was requested on many aspects of the proposal, and this was discussed at a further meeting on July 7.)

In our discussion, the ARA Committee was very aware that members of the ARA, and residents of our 15 streets, hold a range of views over this proposal to provide accommodation for the homeless. So in responding to the Hightown application, the Committee aimed to take a view which while making its objections clear, also offered suggestions for improvement of a future application. The new chair of the Scrutiny Committee, Roma Mills, appears to be a helpful addition to the debate with her strong insistence on robust management for facilities like St Claire's, and the Committee felt this position to be worth supporting. The full text of the Committee's response will be available here on our website in August.

## **ARA WEBSITE**

How are people finding our new website? Is it useful? - a good place to receive our newsletter? — a source we could be using more inventively? Currently it contains information about the ARA, our current newsletter plus all previous ones, minutes from our meetings and from previous AGMS. However, maybe there is more we could be doing with it, for instance gathering information and stories about the history of this area. We've created a page for your contributions and pictures. Do please have a look and let us know what you think. Just follow this link - [www.aboynera.org](http://www.aboynera.org)

## **VERULAMIUM PARK LITTER PICKING - AUGUST 15**

This is the third of the litter picking days in the Park over the summer months. If you'd like to be involved, meet 10.30am at top of the causeway. There is action underway to provide more bins and a double bin is being trialled for recycling + litter.

## **THE BRICKYARD**

The Brickyard continues to have ongoing applications and appeals, so here is an update. After St Albans District Council's (SADC) 14 May rejection of owner James Hanning's application to extend the licence to after-11 pm smoking in the front courtyard, there have been two developments: 1) Mr Hanning appealed against this to St Albans Magistrates who will hear it on 9 October - SADC plans to defend its decision. 2) Mr Hanning wrote to several (but not all) neighbours on the east side of College Street offering mediation as a way of settling existing and on-going differences. The residents have jointly asked APRA (Abbey Precincts Residents Association) to investigate and make a single reply, which they will do after a committee meeting on 10 August. Meanwhile residents continue to monitor noise from the rear garden, which is especially annoying on Friday and Saturday nights - as was always predicted.

## **THE ABBEY LINE - UNDER THREAT**

The Abbey Flyer train line is now facing the threat of being replaced by buses. A controversial proposal is being discussed to take up the rails and replace them with two parallel concrete bus ways to create a scheme known as Bus Rapid Transport, or BRT. It's part of the draft rail strategy, currently out for consultation. At a recent Abbey Flyer User's Group (ABFLY) meeting, there was overwhelming support for the line to be retained. If you feel strongly about this issue, make your voice heard before the closing date of August 10. Visit [hertsdirect.org/railconsultation](http://hertsdirect.org/railconsultation). To access the online form created by ABFLY go to [www.abfly.org.uk/no2bus](http://www.abfly.org.uk/no2bus)

## **VICTORIA PLAYING FIELD IS NOW OFFICIALLY AN ASSET!**

Congratulations to our sister group, the Friends of the Victoria Playing Field (FVPP) - they've succeeded in their request to have the Victoria Playing Field included in the Council's register of assets of community value. (Just in case this category is new to you, in England an asset of community value is land or property of importance to the local community which is subject to additional protection from development under the Localism Act 2011. The registration lasts for 5 years from 6th July 2015.)

Two further updates from FVPP -

### **\*\* GREENSPACE ACTION PLANS**

SADC has commissioned the Hertfordshire Countryside Management Service to assist in the development of Greenspace Action Plans for the area. As part of the consultation process, a meeting, in the form of a walk-around, to outline the draft proposals to interested local residents will take place on the Field between 6 and 7 p.m. on Thursday 30th July. All welcome.

## **\*\*REFURBISHMENT OF CHILDREN'S PLAY AREAS**

As residents may be aware, the current play area is in need of refurbishment. Building upon a recent survey, the Friends are developing proposals both to replace the existing equipment and to provide additional equipment suitable for use by older children. Once the proposals for the play area have been finalised, FVPF will be inviting residents' comments on them before going on to launch a crowdfunding campaign aimed at augmenting the significant funding already earmarked by SADC for the refurbishment of the play area.