

# ARA

## Aboyne Residents Association

Adelaide Street  
Britton Avenue  
Christchurch Close  
Church Crescent  
Catherine Street  
(South side)  
Etna Road  
Folly Lane  
(38-150 evens only)  
Gombards  
Russell Avenue  
Selby Avenue  
Spencer St  
Stapley Road  
Upper Dagnall Sreet  
Upton Avenue  
Worley Road

Newsletter 70 | June 2012

## They once considered demolishing Aboyne Lodge School and turning Gombards Alley into a main road!

### So this is why there is an Aboyne Residents Association

To newer residents, who know little of the past history of this area, this is what we have been involved with over the past 23 years

In 1975 this area was 'deblighted' and saved from mass demolition under a 1960's proposal to build a four-lane highway from Folly Lane to the Russell Ave car park; renovation of the run-down housing followed as the area was re-populated.

Then in 1988 the District Council decided to construct what is now the Drovers Way section of the multi-storey car park on the open space, formerly the cattle market. Traffic in the area was already a problem because of ever-longer and heavier lorries servicing the St Peters Street stores. Drovers Way ended at Adelaide St (no through access to Catherine Street) – the main vehicular access (in and out) was by Britton Ave into Verulam Road. This Residents Association resulted from a protest meeting about local traffic conditions.

#### Some highlights of our lobbying activity

**1990** Kingfisher/Woolworths St Peters Street/Drovers Way development proposals (to include the Aboyne Lodge School site) – not proceeded with.

**1993** Introduction of ban on vehicles over 7.5t in area (except Britton Ave) after the opening of Drovers Way to Catherine Street.

**1994** W S Atkinson transportation plan for the City which involved constructing a new road through Gombards and Gombards Alley to connect Catherine Street with Verulam Road was rejected by Council.

**1995** Demolition of nurses home in Church Crescent and its replacement by a custom-built mental health unit (Albany Lodge) – the

ARA had on-site inspections and were kept informed throughout its construction.

**1996** Donaldson study of projected retail needs in the City centre.

**1997** Hillier Parker Report (based on the Donaldson study) re developing retail space – Drovers Way and Aboyne school site again targeted – only The Maltings eventually resulted.

**1998** Council approval of Controlled Parking Schemes – Zone A was marked out in consultation with us – to start in 1999.

**1998** Grant of £10,000 for improvements to Victoria Playing Field (£7k for tarmac path).

**1998** Introduction of by-laws prohibiting the drinking of alcohol in the City centre.

**2000** Mentmore (Church Crescent) – formerly part of the City Hospital – earmarked for redevelopment as a Childrens Centre – we had on-site tours at all stages until finished in 2001.

**2001** Another attempt to connect Gombards with Verulam Road was rejected by Council – the third attempt to literally divide this area with a new road.

**2003** Proposal to re-locate Aboyne Lodge school to Victoria Playing Field and releasing the site for commercial redevelopment – this was rejected by Council in 2004

**2004** Formation of The Friends of Victoria Playing Field by joint action of ARA Verulam Road Residents Association.

**2008** Introduction of wheelie bins and alternate weekly collection of domestic rubbish and recycling bins

**2009** Enter the debate about the lack of places at Aboyne Lodge school for local children.

**A** lot has happened both nationally and locally since the last Newsletter issued back in November 2009.

First there has been a change of national government, and as from last May a minority Conservative administration is running the District Council. Residents Associations (RA's) are (or should be) independent of party politics and have to work within the system.

Secondly, the Association has been without a Chairman for some years. Vice-Chairman Eddy Battersby has stepped into the breach but could only give limited time and your Secretary has on-going domestic problems which taken together meant that the Association has not been as active as in the past.

However, the Big Society concept of devolution, which has resulted in the Communities and Local Government Act (2012) – the Localism Act – is aimed at neighbourhood groups co-operating with local authorities in decision making on matters which affect their area. This will affect many aspects of municipal life, especially planning (see under Strategic Planning): there is also the issue of Police re-organisation later this year.

It is, therefore, essential in the interests of this area that the Association is re-constituted and to this end it is intended to call an Extraordinary General Meeting as soon as is practical.

### How the ARA is organised

There are four elected officers: Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer. Each road has one or more Street Representatives who are the ears and eyes of the community. Additionally there are others who monitor specific issues eg. planning applications, environmental issues, policing and so on. All these form a loose committee which meets when necessary. The electronic age means that many decisions can now be reached collectively using the net.

Subscriptions are for a household and currently stand at £3 a year. The main expenditure is for Newsletter publishing and room hire. The use of the net for internal communication has cut the cost of photocopying considerably. We have a bank account (at Lloyds) and we are solvent. Cheques have to be signed by the Treasurer and one of the other three elected officers.

The future: many current post-holders have left this area, or are leaving, and others are standing down having done a long stint. It is time for newer, and younger, residents to step forward and volunteer if the Association is to continue. Having been its Secretary for many years I am more than willing to help in a

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transitional stage. I would not like to see the Association fade away – it has a formidable reputation with the District Council (see the campaigning highlights). Living in the City centre, where there will always be development issues, it is essential that residents collectively should be able to contribute to any proposals affecting this area - see under Strategic Planning.

If anyone wants to discuss what is involved in organising, and running, a residents association please contact me on 859546 or byersline@f2s.com.

*Marjorie Byers*

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## Planning

**T**his is one area in which the Association has maintained activity during the past three years.

A lot of houses have changed hands and, as new owners want to upgrade, this has involved submitting formal applications to Council, many of them multiple – the record being nine for one house in Upton Avenue in a nine month period.

Whilst being in a conservation area stops a lot of inappropriate conversions, the downside is having to deal with the minutiae of conservation area requirements. The biggest universal issue is replacement windows followed, more recently, by dormer window extensions.

**Replacement of old wooden window frames by plastic units has been an ongoing battle for years**, the problem being that replacement frames of assorted materials had been used before the area was given Conservation Zone status. Full marks to a local Housing Association which is replacing plastic units with double glazed wooden frames in their properties.

**A reminder to anyone wishing to gut a house and/or dig a basement** – please make sure party wall agreements (where appropriate) are in place before work is started.

Likewise – please consider your immediate neighbours if proposed new windows, especially in dormer extensions, might be intrusive of privacy.

*The Association has a long track record of vetting and handling planning applications – if unsure about what might, or might not, be feasible don't hesitate to contact us.*

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## Look! St Albans

**T**he Prince's Foundation for Building Community, in conjunction with the Civic Society and other local organisations, held a workshop and two public meetings at the end of February with the aim of producing a Design Code for the exterior of public buildings and spaces which could be applied to St Albans.

The aim is to ensure that new developments blend with existing architecture and that sympathetic materials are used in construction.

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## Primary schools

**T**he overcrowding and inability of local residents to get places for their children at Aboyne Lodge School has been a matter of concern for some years. Other schools in central St Albans are also over-subscribed and this has led to questions as to how the County Council Education Dept. calculated the number of places needed.

### Two startling bits of information emerged

- 1 The number of places needed was based not on where the children lived, but on which doctors surgery they were registered at,
- 2 Provision was modelled using the County as a whole unit without regard to the differences between the rural north and the urban south. This is to cease and in future the two distinct areas will be assessed separately.

**Meanwhile, to overcome the immediate overcrowding problem** a new 'free school' (that is government-funded but not under local authority control) is being set up in Hatfield Road on the site of the former Art College/Law School. The Chairman of the Board of Governors is Linda Crawley (former head of Aboyne Lodge) and a head teacher has just been appointed.

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## Strategic planning

**H**uge changes are on the way. Regional development boards have been abolished and the District will soon be publishing its latest structural plan (incorporating, we hope, many of the suggestions made by us and other community groups during the 2009 City Vision project).

But of immediate relevance is the impact that the Communities and Local Government Act (known as the Localism Act) will have on neighbourhoods in respect of planning. This Act enables residents to set up neighbourhood groups in conjunction with local authorities with the aim of preparing neighbourhood plans to manage development in their area.

**This is what this Association has been doing for years, unofficially, and is the main reason why a revitalised organisation, with new organisers, is essential if this area is to retain its character but at the same time constructively liaise with local government.**

**Over the years the Association has opposed three attempts to drive a new road through this area (for easier car park access) and three attempts to acquire the site of Aboyne Lodge school for commercial development.**

Drovers Way – which all acknowledge is an unsightly mess – is currently in the Council's proposals for re-development.

**HERE WE GO AGAIN!**

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## Larks in the Park

**T**he ever-popular Larks in the Park will take place this year on **Sunday 24 June** on Victoria Playing Field. Please put the date in your diary now.

Contributions of second-hand novels in good condition, and also prizes for the tombola (trinkets, non-perishable food etc. - but no alcohol, please - most of our 'customers' are under age!) will be gratefully received. Contact Jan Cropper, 7 Upton Ave (tel. 844363) for more information or to donate books/prizes.

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## Gombards car park

**I**n 2008 leaseholders of the garages there (operated by the Council Estates Dept.) were sent a notice of intent saying that, because of the state of disrepair, and the excessive cost of restoring them, alternative use of that piece of land was being sought.

New housing was proposed but the issue seems to have been placed on the back burner.

However, it has not gone away and any information from garage leaseholders who have been contacted by Council would be appreciated.

When this proposal was announced the Association protested about the removal of parking space provision because these garages were taken into account when the Controlled Parking Zones (CPZ) were set up. Removal of the equivalent of 27 parking places in this area is unacceptable.

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## Street lighting

**T**he County Council aim to save £1.3 million by switching to part-time lighting of (mainly) residential roads. Illumination of main highways (A and some B roads) will not be affected but all other street lights will be switched-off at midnight until 6.00am.

This will come into effect in St Albans very soon. Details can be found on [www.hertsdirect.org/highwaysonline](http://www.hertsdirect.org/highwaysonline)

Concern has been expressed about safety for pedestrians, especially those returning by train after midnight, and on crime. The Police say they have no evidence from areas already 'switched off' that crime has increased.

To report lights that are damaged or not working tel: 0300 1234 047 or go to [www.hertsdirect.org/highwayfaults](http://www.hertsdirect.org/highwayfaults)

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## Demise of Herts Highways

From September responsibility for road maintenance passes to a new contractor, Ringway Infrastructure Services. Until then continue to use phone and website details as above.