

Autumn 2021 Newsletter



Tentative Steps...

Whilst AHRA has decided not to hold in-person meetings over the summer, work has continued on a number of fronts, and it feels like we're taking giant strides in some areas and going backwards in others!

The skyline of Alton is changing on a daily basis with the ongoing demolition of the Coors Brewery. Walls are emerging to form the new retirement home on the old Magistrates Court. New enterprises continue to open in the High Street and across our open spaces, and the first year of the wildflower garden on the grassy verge off Butts Road and Borovere Gardens has been a welcome sight. Yet amongst all these changes, the constancy of the River Wey with its varied visitors provides a comforting familiarity which is being cherished by old and new residents. For bird-lovers, 'our little stretch' of the River has played host to kingfishers, egrets, herons, moorhens, ducks, and geese, and in the evenings, you can often hear owls calling out as they go about their nightly patrols.

There was so much to cram into the newsletter and I'm sure we've missed something! I hope you find this a useful update of the activities which AHRA has been involved in over recent months.

Sadly, we felt we needed to postpone our social gathering for members until next year, but we're all keen to meet in person once we're able to.

In the meantime, don't forget that if you want to raise anything, do send an email to ameryhillresidents@hotmail.co.uk.

Future of the High Street

In early summer, there was a consultation about the future of a number of town High Streets, carried out by Heartflood on behalf of East Hampshire District Council. We felt strongly that the importance of the future of the town centre deserved more detail than the sketchy information collected via the questions in the surveys. As a result, we submitted an additional paper directly to Heartflood. We are grateful to the Alton Herald for covering this.

We are awaiting an update from Julie McLatch – watch this space for further news.

Our report was published in its entirety on the ADRA website – www.adra.community under AHRA's page.

Community Hospital – Some Good News about Health Provision in Alton

Charles Kaye attended the Alton Town Council Community Committee Meeting in September. As a member of Alton & District Residents' Associations (ADRA), Charles was one of the members of the ADRA sub-group focusing on health provision for Alton, and he's continued to lobby in the background, although the ADRA sub-group disbanded a while ago. Included below is his report about the meeting.

Two representatives from Southern Health Care Trust attended to share plans for inpatient services. They were Becky Housley, Area Matron and Craig Rees, Head of Operations.

Their news was positive. The Trust has got agreement and finance for the reopening of the upstairs ward for 'hospital discharges and Community support'. This will include patients being moved on from General Hospitals and admissions from local GPs for short term care. Also End of Life care.

A budget of £4.6million has been set aside; of this £1.6m is for building costs and £3m annually for running costs. Their target timetable is for first admissions to take place in the Autumn and for the full twenty beds to be available by the Spring 2022. Medical cover will be provided by Petersfield GPs (as with existing beds). Staff recruitment has already started. (This seems a worthy but very ambitious target given the capital sum involved and the existing competition for healthcare staff.)

Occupants of the offices that have been using the ward space upstairs will be re-housed; nonclinical personnel offsite, clinical care workers elsewhere in the building.

The question of the Outpatient and other services provided by North Hampshire Hospitals Trust remains unanswered; they have not responded to requests to share their future plans for Alton.

Since then, Charles has been garnering views from various stakeholders around Alton about services that could be provided by Hampshire Hospitals' Trust (HHT) in terms of our outpatient clinics and diagnostic facilities. Our Community Hospital is, in effect, two separate units in the same building with very little intercommunication. It is hoped that HHT will soon be making a presentation to Alton Town Council about their plans for a new General Hospital in Basingstoke. What we need to do is to get them to optimise the use of our local hospital to serve our expanding population – the more local provision, the fewer journeys to Basingstoke – greener and healthier!

Huge thanks to Charles for his persistence in not only keeping us informed about health provision in Alton, but also making sure that the need for local services for Altonians is not forgotten amongst all the other voices!

Flood Meadows

We have continued our close involvement with the Flood Meadows. Charles and Louise have drafted a new leaflet describing the Flood Meadows which will be published by Alton Town Council and available to visitors. The text is almost complete and we hope it will be out in the New Year.

In terms of the physical appearance of the Flood Meadows and the river, there are several developments to report:

- Gravel recharging by the Lenten Street bridge – this is adding substrate to the river bed to improve flow and encourage biodiversity in the river. It also improves its appearance!
- A green building has appeared at the end of Tanhouse Lane, behind the car park. This is to be a place where the Alton Society volunteers can keep their tools and equipment between their monthly sessions. It is worth stressing that there will be no expensive power tools housed in the shed.



Photo courtesy of Brian Good

- An annual tree survey is being carried out for the Town Council. Final results are not yet available but it seems likely that a number of dying ash trees will have to be felled.
- Footpaths are a problem: their condition is deteriorating. A contract has been let to carry out repairs to the riverside path and the contractors started work on site at the end of November. They hope to be completed by Christmas. Repairs to the tarmac paths is another priority and we hope the Council will be able to fund some upgrades in 2022.

Friends of River Wey

This is a new body set up by the Town Council to advise them on issues and concerns with regard to the river and adjacent open spaces between Brick Kiln Lane and the railway embankment between the Brewery site and Kings' Pond. It has representation from a number of individuals who are actively involved in the river and its immediate vicinity.

Terms of Reference for the Friends of the River Wey can be found under the AHRA page on the ADRA website. The first meeting was held on 9th November: Charles was chosen as Chairman and Louise as Secretary. We will be in a good position to keep you updated!

Update on Alton's Development Sites – large and small!

“Rivermead” – formerly known as CALA Homes / Coors Brewery Site

In our last newsletter, we reported that we were hopeful about engaging with CALA, the developers of the Brewery site, due to our involvement with the Wey Walk, the route of which traverses the site and links the High Street with King's Pond.

We are delighted to say that not only have we attended several of the Coors Developer Liaison Meetings in that time, but that the meetings are being very positive. The engagement from all stakeholders is very encouraging and has laid good foundations for the coming months and years as the new development emerges from the old Brewery Site. At the time of writing, the chimney has just been pulled down – a very symbolic moment for many people, both those that have worked on the Brewery site, or those who have lived in Alton and considered it part of the industrial landscape in the town centre.



Photo courtesy of Paula Langley

The current focus is on the demolition of the site, but we keep the protection of the River Wey, as well as questions about flood risk, drainage, etc on the agenda and are looking forward to close collaboration when it is the appropriate time to discuss the Wey Walk.

In the meantime, we have agreed to take the lead on a Working Party to progress the Rivermead Artworks project. Following several requests from the wider community for a memorial to Alton's Brewing Heritage, we drafted a proposal which comprises three elements: a welcome archway to the site (mirroring the Lenten Street archway which was our 2020 project), a Heritage Trail running alongside the river with sculptural posts that take their inspiration from items salvaged from the old Brewery, and a multi-media archive capturing memories of brewing in Alton. Our draft proposal was accepted at the November Liaison meeting, and a Working Party is now being formed so that we can turn this into reality. The call will go out to local artists who may wish to get involved, and there will be the inevitable challenge of finding funding for the project. If anyone is interested in knowing more, get in touch!

Hopfield Place / Redrow Update

Whilst the river levels in Flood Meadows have stayed higher than usual this year, the Redrow Developer Liaison Meetings dried up earlier this year. The 'Snagging List' including items raised by homeowners continue to be tackled as Redrow finish the building works and prepare to leave the site. However, sadly, the bigger questions around drainage, flooding, ongoing engagement with the Management Company remain unanswered. This is hugely disappointing, but we haven't given up hope that we get the answers to our questions before they finally leave.

BUT – Redrow do need to be applauded for two particular activities. Firstly, we are delighted that Alton Town Council is now the owner of Will Hall Meadow, and this important open space has been secured for public access for generations to come. Well done to Alton's Town Councillors and Officers, and Redrow, for ensuring our vision became a reality and we have a legacy for the future.

Also, once its ownership had been confirmed, we're grateful to the Redrow team for acting swiftly to clear the ditch running alongside Brick Kiln Lane and doing their bit in ensuring we are all doing everything possible to mitigate flash flooding events around the town. This will be a important activity that will form part of the maintenance of the site once it transfers to the Hopfield Place Management Company.

Gothic Cottages

This pair of attractive mid-Victorian houses stands next to Amery Hill School and opposite the Quaker Meeting Room. Over five years ago we noticed that the left hand one was empty and showing signs of neglect. Since then we had been working with EHDC officials and local councillors to get essential repairs carried out. The house remains empty and the dilapidations clearly visible in the building's fabric remain. At the start of 2021, EHDC officials told us they are no longer pursuing the owner for action and they consider the matter closed. This was disappointing to us. There was an article in the Spring edition of the Alton Society Newsletter describing our fruitless quest to encourage positive action, but nothing has transpired over the summer months. We continue to hope that something will be done to protect this property...

Vicarage Hill

Building has started on a site halfway up Vicarage Hill on the left-hand side as you go up the hill. A single bungalow has been demolished and a terrace of three houses is rising in its place. We objected to this development but were not heeded.

Upcoming Consultations

You won't have failed to notice the number of consultations about future development around Alton. The proposal for the Veolia Materials Recovery Facility on the A31 has recently been back out for consultation. There is very strong opposition and Hampshire County Council have yet to make a decision.

There was also a presentation about the 'Southern Gateway' to Alton by the Butts Bridge, with the current proposal being shared by the developer and people being encouraged to make comments. We scrutinised the plans for a nursing home on the site, along with illustrations for an public open space, and made our comments. Concerns include the risk of flooding on site, was there need for another nursing home, problems of setting it and the marginal value of the proposed 'gateway park', a small space not readily accessible. We wait to see what happens in the coming months...

Finally, many of you will have seen the wide coverage about the proposed development of Chawton Park Farm which, if approved, will see 1,200 homes built on a greenfield site. Vehement opposition to this potential development site is being spearheaded by The Alton Society.

Flood Action Plan

As reported in previous newsletters, following the flash floods last year which affected many parts of our town, flooding had gained a lot of focus by our local Town, District and County councillors. It was hoped that a local Steering Group would be set up, and we had been assured that AHRA will be involved from the outset. We continue to be engaged with EHDC and HCC in relation to specific, tactical activities, such as the maintenance required to the river upstream of Cut Pound and potential solutions to the run-off that pours down Brick Kiln Lane when there is torrential rainfall. The need for a comprehensive Flood Action / Preventative Plan remains unfilled and we will press Councillors for results.

Useful Contact Information

If you would like to receive more regular updates, please send an email to ameryhillresidents@hotmail.co.uk to be added to our mailing list.

Alton Town Council:	01420 83986; info@alton.gov.uk ; www.alton.gov.uk
East Hampshire District Council	01730 266551, www.easthants.gov.uk
Hampshire County Council	0300 555 1375; info@hants.gov.uk ; www.hants.gov.uk
The Alton Society:	www.altonsociety.org.uk
Alton & District Residents' Association:	www.adra.community

Various Facebook Groups:

Love Alton	Alton Matters
Alton News	

Volunteering

If you would like to get involved with your local residents' association, do get in touch. Whilst we are not meeting in person, we continue to be an active group and always welcome people to join and help their local community. Drop an email to ameryhillresidents@hotmail.co.uk if you would like to know more about how you can get involved.