

*Inspired by the past, picture your future...*

# LOOK! St Albans our community voice on design

*"In the spirit of community-led neighbourhood planning our ethos is to be transparent, proactive, respectful, collaborative, open, diverse, explorative and community-rooted."*  
<http://www.lookstalbans.org/> email [lookstalbans@gmail.com](mailto:lookstalbans@gmail.com) Twitter [@LookStAlbans](https://twitter.com/LookStAlbans)

**Minutes of Look! St Albans 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual General Meeting held on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> April 2016 at  
7.30pm  
The Octagon Room, St Peter's Church, St Peters Street  
St Albans AL1 3HG**

7.30pm Chair welcomed everyone for coming along on a cold night. She had anticipated that by moving the AGM to spring the weather would have been warmer than it had proven. Also whilst trying to avoid the school holidays we had inadvertently forgotten about the impending local elections, therefore apologies to councillors who would have liked to have attended but were otherwise engaged.

7.35pm The Secretary established there was a quorum.

Representatives' Group members present

Vanessa Gregory, James Gregory, Chris Debenham, Mel Hilbrow, John Hoad, Helen Bishop, Dan Fletcher, Councillor Julian Daly, Councillor Beric Read, Graeme Eastham, Nigel Gale

Apologies for absence received from Anthony Oliver, John Metcalf, Christine McDermott, Sheila Wright and Angela Koch

Minutes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual General Meeting held on Monday 9th February 2015 to be approved.

These were proposed for adoption by Graeme Eastham and seconded by Helen Bishop  
These were approved by a majority vote with 9 abstentions.

Matters Arising: None were raised



The Chair formally identified those individuals and organisations to be found in Appendix A Representatives Group and welcomed our new member Nigel Gale.

Treasurer's Report.

## LOOK! ST ALBANS - OUR COMMUNITY VOICE ON DESIGN

### Summary of Receipts and Payments - year ended 31st March 2016

	<u>2015/16</u>		<u>2014/15</u>
<b><u>RECEIPTS</u></b>			
Donations			
Public collections	0.00		293.05
Individuals	100.63		660.87
Locality Budget Grant from County Councillor Chris White	900.00		
Grassroots Award - Skipton BS	<u>500.00</u>	1500.63	<u>0.00</u> 953.92
<b><u>PAYMENTS</u></b>			
Public meetings			
Banner	0.00		0.00
Sound and projection	0.00		0.00
Hire of premises	0.00		55.00
Charrette refreshments	0.00		170.54
AGM refreshments	0.00		22.07
Insurances	471.72		471.72
Website/social media	126.12		82.36
Printing/stationery	29.97		0.00
Subscriptions	<u>66.00</u>	<u>693.81</u>	<u>36.34</u> 838.03
 SURPLUS/(LOSS) for the year		 <u>£806.82</u>	 <u>£115.89</u>



## LOOK! ST ALBANS - OUR COMMUNITY VOICE ON DESIGN

### Balance sheet at 31st March 2016

	<u>2015/16</u>	<u>2014/15</u>
ASSETS		
Cash at bank	1,179.47	372.65
Represented by:		
ACCUMULATED FUND		
As at 31.03.15	372.65	256.76
Add surplus/(deficit) for year	<u>806.82</u>	<u>115.89</u>
As at 31.03.16	<u>£1,179.47</u>	<u>£372.65</u>

### **LOOK! ST ALBANS - OUR COMMUNITY VOICE ON DESIGN** Report by the Treasurer for the period ended 31 March 2016

From the Balance Sheet you will see that Look! held £1,179.47 in the bank at the end of the financial year in question, and that the surplus for the year was £806.82. Whilst encouraging on the face of it, it should however be noted that during the accounting year in question, there was neither a charrette or other unexpected meeting, nor was an AGM held, the previous one having taken place shortly before the year began.

Expenditure amounted to less than the budgeted figure, but indications are that more will be spent during 2016/17, not least as opportunities to host charrettes and their related meetings arise more frequently. Indeed, a single charrette could involve us in having to spend all of the monies held, which could clearly diminish our ability to host future meetings.

The income figure of just over £1,500 was made up almost entirely of a Grant and an Award. We are grateful for having received a Grant under the Locality Budget Scheme; and also an Award of money under Skipton Building Society's Grassroots Award Scheme. These sums are very welcome, but we recognise that we cannot count on receiving similar amounts from the same sources every year.

Raising new funds is a continuing problem, and I would like to think that supporters of Look!



would be prepared to make donations from time to time, to avoid the burden falling on the officers. The Look! website gives details of how this can be done.

April 2016

Christopher Debenham, Treasurer

### Look! St Albans - Our Community Voice on Design

These were proposed for adoption by Mel Hilbrow and seconded by Councillor Beric Read. These were approved unanimously.

### Chairman's Annual Report.

I've been recalling where I know for sure Look! St Albans ground-breaking work has been mentioned and discussed within the last year. Portcullis House (part of the Houses of Parliament) twice at least. The Legatum Institute London, St James's Palace, House of Lords in a debate, Soho, Bristol, Coventry, Norwich, Oxford and Civic Voice's weekly news update with potential readership of I think about 250,000 and The University of Hertfordshire Hatfield.

This evening resident's in Thanet are hearing about the ground-breaking work of Look! St Albans. I hope you will join me in sending them our very best wishes and hope they feel inspired to get involved in the growing movement of communities becoming proactively involved in neighbourhood planning.

Since The Localism Act was enacted in 2011 across the country 1,800 communities, representing nearly 10 million people, have begun the process of producing neighbourhood plans.

More than 170 neighbourhood planning referendums have taken place, with an average 89% of 'yes' votes, representing more than 300,000 votes cast. I accept that these are encouraging figures but not overwhelming, however with a further 1,630 neighbourhood plans in progress that means a heck of a number of people are willing to be proactive in planning their areas. Later this evening you will hear from our guest speaker Chris Weatherburn how BIMBY can hopefully help many more communities to become positively involved.

Collaborative planning, as I hope we have proven can have serious purpose but also can be fun and involve all generations and backgrounds.

As many of you know our model is unique, we are not a neighbourhood forum but definitely working within that spirit of positive, proactive collaborative planning. Our remit which came from the community is to be a community led group, which actively promotes community engagement on significant developments in central St Albans. Our core



document is our workshop report co- authored with the Prince's Foundation which contains our draft design codes. These are not adopted policy of the council. Our colleagues at the council could do worse though than thoroughly examine our report to see what could be included in the detailed local plan. However there is no getting away from the power of our document as it stands, as it was community-led and community endorsed.

As was pointed out to me the other day, we can't force landowners and developers to work with us, we can but encourage by our willingness to work positively with them. Many of us firmly believe it is in their best interests and ours to have developments in St Albans of which we can all be proud. However I am beginning to think that if it were mandatory to work proactively with communities at an early stage in the planning process whether that would be helpful, as my mother used to say (and with apologies to any developers in the room) "you can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink!"

As many of you know the first planning application informed by a community led design charrette, using our draft design codes at its core, gained unanimous approval in St Albans recently for the Museums Site Hatfield Road. Unfortunately the role of 'the ordinary folk' who played an early pivotal role in this achievement was sadly completely airbrushed out in the local newspapers reporting. A number of you gave over 300 hour's work, a labour of love, to create the design concept that was taken forward into the planning application. We, together, ensured the main architectural features of the much loved museum building was retained, the highly valued mature trees were retained which we saw on our site visit and led to the name Oak Tree Gardens. Because of our concerns to ensure this was a truly sustainable development we came up with a concept, that not only respected its sensitive location, but following on from that concept will achieve a passive system reducing by 30% its energy demands. Not one word in the local press about this. Wear that as a badge of honour as, we didn't wait until a planning application emerged and then whinged about it, so easy to do, not much effort required. We were proactive, because we care and are fed up with poor design in the city we love. We have the tools and the methodology to do better and as acknowledged by most we achieved that.

So much so, as many of you know, Look! St Albans has been shortlisted by judges in the Planning & Placemaking Awards both nationally and regionally for this design charrette. Planning Magazine is seen as essential reading for everyone in the planning sector, including local authorities and developers, so not an insignificant achievement. Some of us will be going along to the awards evening and whether we win or not this is one heck of an achievement for all those who helped shape our design codes and took part in the design charrette.

**So give yourself a pat on the back for our collective achievement!**



I can understand professionals' hesitancy, as for most our methodology is new to them. I want to read a couple of extract from professionals we have worked with for whom the process was new.

Debbi White, Property & Asset Manager, St Albans City & District Council said *"When it was suggested to me that Look! St Albans should host a design charrette using their community endorsed design codes it was a new concept to me and I didn't know what to expect. I soon realised however that it's a great way of bringing together people with different interests and agendas. The scale building blocks (a part of the design codes) were a useful and fun tool for getting people to work towards a common goal. There is a wealth of knowledge, skill and some great ideas out there and a design charrette is a way for developers to tap into this."*

Simon Cove from Kirby Cove Architects, the architects for the scheme *"To us as architects Placemaking is about creating a quality of the environment - space, both internal and external space and how the buildings we design can add value to 'the place' in question. More often than not an appointed professional team will carry out this design exercise. But, what about people? ..... the actual placemakers?"*

*Our planning system encourages localism and neighbourhood consultation, but this invariably takes place after the preparation of designs, often after much expense and so very often after irreversible key development decisions have been made ..... enter the Charrette process !*

*The Charrette process to take place for the MoStA site was our first, and I suspect a first for many others too. Right at the start of the design process, the community were encouraged to attend and contribute their ideas that would formulate, actually create development proposals for the site. Over an intensive, if not fun weekend and from blank pieces of paper, 4 conceptual designs for the site emerged. A democratic process then voted for the preferred concept and thus we were 'told' what was wanted!*

*In our case the result was the 'Oak Tree Gardens' concept scheme no.1, and our job to follow was quite simply to take it forward and make it work! I cannot say that was necessarily a straightforward process, but knowing that community support is behind you certainly makes a difference, a very welcome difference. Design is all about community and between us ALL, I hope we have created a welcome addition to the City of St Albans. Through the Charrette process we all have the opportunity to contribute to placemaking. Isn't this how it should be?"*

I don't want to take much more of your time so here are the edited highlights from the last year, more details can be found on our news and events webpage.

We are greatly indebted to County Councillor White's £900 grant from his locality budget. This has been truly a life saver.

 **We're proud to be one of Skipton Building Society's Grassroots Giving Winners, recognised for supporting our local community.** 

GRASSROOTS GIVING SKIPTON BUILDING SOCIETY For life ahead

This initiative is supported by:

FSRA: Fishpool Street Residents Association

Cunningham Residents Association

Garden Fields Residents

HAA The Hertfordshire Association of Architects

OAKLANDS COLLEGE

St Albans and Hertfordshire Architectural and Archaeological Society

St Albans Retail Forum

THE CATHEDRAL AND ABBEY CHURCH OF SAINT ALBAN

boyne Residents Association

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We won, on a public vote, a Skipton Building Society's Grassroots Giving grant of £500! From 1,023 applications received Look! was one of the 162 successful groups. We had tremendous help and have built an excellent relationship and continued support from Michael McHugh Branch Manager of Skipton Building Society in St Albans and his colleagues.

Look! St Albans was asked by The Prince's Foundation for Building Community to road test (prelaunch) their new online toolkit. Which you will hear more about shortly.

Look! St Albans took part in the first ever Sustainable St Albans Week. I am delighted there is to be one this year. There are so many people in St Albans working and promoting ways in which, in some cases simple changes and indeed sociable changes in our lives can help our precious planet.

Look! St Albans joined The Green Triangle, this is a partnership which has been formed through a collaboration of BRE, Rothamsted Research Establishment, The University of Hertfordshire, St Albans District Council and Oaklands College. As Look! aims to help shape durable, adaptable and truly sustainable buildings and open spaces we need to encourage all local people to bring their skills and knowledge to our design charrettes. We look forward to welcoming many within this partnership to take part future events.

Look! St Albans mentioned in a debate on a private members bill in the House of Lords on 20th November 2015. We were delighted to give our support as at the heart of the Direct Planning (Pilot) Bill stood three key ambitions: to enable better collaborative plan-making by providing financial support to communities that would like to use the format of Design Charrettes, - to secure the actual delivery of higher design quality and better places through Design Codes, and - to ensure sustained financial support for Neighbourhood Planning by accessing mainstream Local Authority budgets.

The minister invited Lord Lexden (who proposed the bill) to have meetings with her and her ministerial colleagues. So we can only hope that something positive will come out of these discussions.

What the next year will bring I don't know, whether we have a design charrette or not we need to stand ready and I echo Chris Debenhams plea for donations large or small to help us to be ready. One thing I do look forward to is working with you who share the same love for our wonderful city.

Thank you

Following the Chair's report a few general questions, suggestion and points were raised and discussed including ideas on raising funds.

The Chair closed the meeting formally at 8pm.



The Chair then warmly welcomed our speaker Chris Weatherburn, Policy Communications Leader, Prince's Foundation for Building Community to talk about The Foundations new online toolkit BIMBY (Beauty In My Back Yard) "Putting the power in your hands to influence new buildings in your area." Look! St Albans had been delighted to be asked to road test before the website had gone live.

Chris and Vanessa had been delighted to have been asked and gave a joint presentation the previous week to officers in St Albans City and District Council Planning Department.

Chris's presentation can be found on the Look! St Albans website. After the presentation Chris kindly took questions and a lively discussion on BIMBY and of neighbourhood planning in general ensued, this carried on over drinks.

These minutes were approved by those present and signed by the chairman at the 4<sup>th</sup> AGM held on Monday 5<sup>th</sup> June 2017

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Chair Look! St Albans Our Community Voice on Design

