

A Vision for Fishpool Street – November 2020

Produced by the Fishpool Street Residents' Association and its members

Introduction

The unique character of Fishpool Street has evolved over the centuries by serving the people who use it. This evolution will inevitably continue but, in the modern age, vision and effort are needed to strike a balance between change and conservation of our heritage.

This document has been drafted with the intention that it should be used, either as a whole or in sections, for the following purposes:

- a. As a Neighbourhood Plan to be incorporated into a St Albans Local Structure Plan when such a plan is agreed in compliance with the Government's stated localism policy.
- b. To guide comments on any planning applications which might affect the street.
- c. As a definition, for anyone who is interested, of what is special about Fishpool Street and how the present generation intends to manage change so as to hand on a legacy which conserves the street's historic character.

The vision recognises and suggests ways to maintain and enhance Fishpool Street's various roles as:

1. A living community for people of all ages whether long-term residents or new arrivals
2. An aesthetically pleasing site of architectural and historical interest
3. A place of historic and heritage interest for visitors to enjoy
4. A place to do business whether as a local trader such as the hotel, the pub and the school, as an external supplier of services or even just as a customer
5. An historic right of way used by appropriate traffic to access local properties.

While the demands of fulfilling these roles may in some ways be mutually contradictory, the aim in preparing this vision document is to suggest realistic strategic objectives under each of several specific headings which might be workable in combination.

It is to be emphasised that the document was compiled by the Committee of the FSRA from ideas put forward by members.

It was first ratified at the AGM of the association on 23 May 2017 but this version includes some minor additions as suggested by members since then and approved at the AGM on 29 September 2020.

The document is available to all members, via the newsletter and the website, and is incorporated in a 'Welcome Pack' which is distributed to all new residents when they move in to the street.

It is a dynamic document which needs to be updated regularly to maintain its validity. All members are invited to make suggestions for changes or additions to the document at any time. The co-ordination of these suggestions is by the FSRA Committee which will produce a revised draft for consideration at each AGM of the FSRA.

Community

While the street scene and the proximity to the city centre are important in making Fishpool Street a popular place to live, the overwhelming attraction is the sense of community.

Most residents are friendly, chat happily in the street, gather together socially and participate in local events. The street seems more like a village, and this is largely due to the diversity of the population in terms of age, wealth, interests and status. This diversity of people is helped by the variety of property types in the street.

The vision is to encourage the continuity of these diversities and thereby support and strengthen the community spirit.

The Fishpool Street Residents' Association is a key element in furthering the interests of the community.

Most residents already belong to it, but the vision is to build an even larger membership and more participatory involvement in the FSRA's activities, which include:

- Organising events both social and practical
- Monitoring planning applications to highlight those of local interest and, where appropriate, encouraging residents to comment on them
- Acting as a representative of local interests in relations with local authorities, providers of infrastructure services and other civic organisations
- Acting as a local lobbying group
- Co-operative participation with neighbouring residents' groups
- Facilitating communication via the newsletter, email and social media.

Buildings in the Street

Fishpool Street is a significant component of the conservation area in our heritage city. It is one of the most historic streets, is of significance in attracting visitors to St Albans and is said to be of national importance. The present generation of property owners has a responsibility to conserve the historic character of this special place.

It is recognised that change must take place in any living environment. Indeed, it is the changes that have occurred in the past which have resulted in the present aesthetically appealing environment. It is the way change takes place that is important and which this vision addresses.

The maintenance of all properties should be to a high standard so that there is no dilapidation or apparent neglect. All materials used should be of high quality and appropriate for the heritage environment.

Any extensions to existing properties or construction of new buildings should use architects and project managers who are skilled in the design and supervision of work in historic environments.

The design of any building work should be appropriate to the heritage environment in scale, proportion and quality of materials used. Style should be complementary to the surroundings, whether contemporary or traditional. Wherever possible without detriment to the street scene, energy efficient insulation and solar panels should be encouraged.

The combining of small houses into larger units should be opposed, unless it is a reversion to an earlier configuration, because the heritage of the street is in the diversity of the property types. It would be out of character for the street to be predominantly large houses.

These principles should apply to the buildings of businesses in the street as well as to private houses.

The Street Scene

The street lamps in the Abbey parish section of the street are currently a disgrace for a heritage conservation area and the vision is for these to be replaced by elegant traditional lamp standards similar to those installed a few years ago in the part of the street in St Michael's parish. The elements should of course be modern and energy efficient without detriment to the aesthetics of the street scene. Such lamps should also be installed in Romeland.

Repairs to the street surfaces should always maintain the granite set gutters, the pavements should always be repaired using the classic grey bricks and the 'Chinaman's Hat' posts should be kept upright and properly painted.

Repairs to the kerbs, including the elevated ones, should be effected speedily and with the right materials whenever they are damaged. The substitution of tarmac or concrete for other materials is not acceptable.

The street scene includes trees which have a highly beneficial aesthetic effect. Trees located in properties in neighbouring streets can also have a big impact on the Fishpool Street scene. The impact of any potential work on trees in or near the street should be considered when permission is sought. In compliance with the policy of 'greening the city', whenever it is necessary to remove a tree at least one replacement should be planted nearby.

The respective local authorities must constantly be encouraged to maintain the street to a high standard. The vision is for regular sweeping and proper control of weed growth. The drains should be regularly cleared. Traffic signs should be properly maintained.

When the local authorities do not perform their tasks to an adequate standard, as well as putting pressure on them to do so, property owners should show community responsibility and themselves make an effort to remove litter and weeds from the adjacent section of street.

Parking inevitably impacts the street scene significantly. This is considered under 'Traffic'.

Infrastructure Services

We as a community need to fight for better infrastructure provisions with an emphasis on energy efficiency and water saving.

The ideal should be for all cables and wires to be put under ground, and ultimately all television aerials to be made internal – to improve the aesthetics of the street.

Telephone and internet connection should be provided using the latest technical systems and should be updated regularly to ensure that they are at the highest available standard.

Whenever repairs are required to underground cables and pipes the surface should be made good to the original standard without leaving a contrasting scar in the ground.

While the local authority's service for waste collection and re-cycling is good, other services such as gully clearance, weed control and street sweeping should be of an equally high standard.

The provision of appropriate street lamps for the heritage conservation area is another requirement of the vision – as mentioned above.

Business

Those businesses that operate in or near the street should follow the same strategic goals as residents in terms of their properties – good routine maintenance and any changes or new developments to be sympathetic to the heritage environment.

Where business operations impinge on the street and the lifestyle of the residents there should always be good communication of intentions and an opportunity to discuss the impacts.

Being a narrow street with homes located close to the road, business and commercial traffic – including deliveries and collections – should be scheduled between 7am and 10pm to avoid noise and disturbance to residents outside those hours.

Services delivered by local businesses should all be of a high quality, in keeping with the nature of the street.

Whenever residents or businesses employ tradesmen to work on buildings in the street, they should be encouraged to make minimum disturbance and particularly to manage vehicle movements and parking to avoid blockages or congestion. Residents should be aware of the need for through-traffic, including school coaches, to be able to pass. With the increasing popularity of working from home this should be carried out in such a way as not to interfere with the lifestyle of other residents.

Traffic

Parking in the street is essential for residents. Proposed changes to the regulations have been promised for years and implemented only very slowly. Our vision is for more consultation with the parking authority, and a speedier implementation of agreed scheme changes.

As technology advances, and pollution reduction becomes more important, consideration should be given to the provision of charging points for electric cars – possibly installing them adjacent to lamp standards or in the face of the raised footpath where they would not be visually intrusive.

Heavy vehicles should only use the street for access, and when special permission has been granted for the occasion under a scheme similar to that used for restricting parking.

Where regular collections and deliveries are required, including refuse collection and the transport of school children, arrangements should be made for vehicles to be used which are of a size sensitive to the heritage nature of the conservation area. The timing of such movements should be arranged to avoid conflicts with other large vehicles (e.g. no deliveries at the same time as school coaches are scheduled).

In order to minimise congestion and disturbance, parents of school children should be encouraged not to use the street regularly for dropping off and collection.

The street is an ancient highway but other more modern roads now provide for through-traffic. The use of the street as a rat-run is to be discouraged. Following the publication of the Hertfordshire County Council's draft *Speed Management Strategy* in September 2020 we will explore its suggested approaches to managing excess speed in the 20mph zone, co-operating with the police and other relevant bodies to adopt additional and appropriate means to further reduce the still prevalent incidence of illegal speeding in the street.

The use of the street by coaches for St Albans School has involved some large vehicles designed for long distance luxury travel, powered by polluting diesel engines, which are not sensitive to the heritage conservation area. The vision is for them to be replaced in the near term with more appropriate school buses of a smaller size which may accommodate at least as many children, and are powered by more environmentally sensitive engines.

In the longer term to reduce and ultimately to eradicate the need for school buses to use Fishpool Street by allocating alternative stopping zones in more appropriate settings outside the conservation area.

A revised code of practice for St Albans School coaches needs to be negotiated between the school, the local authorities and relevant residents' associations. This should cover such issues as:

- A strictly enforced one-way system
- Staggered arrivals and departures to reduce waiting
- No double parking
- Engines to be switched off when waiting
- Compliance with the 20mph speed limit
- Monitoring and regular review by the school

Updated 11 November 2020