



ALTON CHAMBER

NEWS

June 2011

The Voice of Alton Business

TESCO WIN THE APPEAL TO BUILD SUPERSTORE IN MILL LANE

After several planning applications and two appeals against refusal, Tesco has finally got the go-ahead to build a Superstore at the end of Mill Lane .

For more information click on the Tesco link below



Financial Report



Secretary's Corner



TESCO WIN APPEAL



THE ALTON SHOW

Sunday 3rd July



ALTON FOOD and Craft Festival



Alton Bus Rally & Running Day



LAST NIGHT OF THE PROMS



ALTON COLLEGE MEDIA STUDENTS OFFER FREE COMPANY VIDEO



... and finally

EDITORIAL TEAM

and regular contributors

Editor	David Gay
Business	Mike Baker
Financial	Andy Smith
ACE Ltd	Stephen Lewis
Community	Pat Lerew
Local News	Stephen Lewis
Entertainment	David Gay

THIS MONTH'S MEETING

Allen Gallery
Thursday 30th June
6.30pm

You can join other Chamber members at the Allen Gallery to find out more about the "Hampshire Museums and Galleries Trust", which is taking over the running of both the Allen Gallery and the Curtis Museum.

After the visit to the Allen Gallery, those wishing to dine can join other members and guests at the Balti Restaurant in Market Street Alley.

Please advise the Chamber Secretary if you wish to attend either or both parts of the evening.

CLICK ON ICON FOR MORE INFO

THE UNCERTAINTY CONTINUES

A Financial report from HSBC Bank

Although GDP in Q1 made up most of the ground lost at the end of last year, recent data suggest that activity is again stalling, and forecasts for Q2 and for 2011 as a whole are being marked down. The balance of the discussion has shifted back to concerns about growth rather than inflation, and whether the Chancellor's fiscal plans have sufficient flexibility to cope with a weakening of output. But the growth argument is not about whether the economy will slide back into recession, but about the pace of activity this year - essentially about the first digit after the decimal point. The range at present is from a pessimistic 1.2% increase in GDP to an optimistic 1.7%.

Concerns about the tightening squeeze on the consumer are the main worry. While the MPC's anti-inflation credibility has been undermined, there is an acceptance that much of the price pressure is either external or the result of tax changes, and higher interest rates will do more to slow the economy than dampen down inflation. So, at last, questions are being asked about the relevance of the current inflation target, set by Gordon Brown in 2003 when circumstances were very different. This, however, is a debate that will be left on hold for a while yet.

Growth again a worry

Evidence abounds of a squeeze on the consumer sector. As the annual rise in the Consumer Price Index (currently 4.5%) continues to outstrip the increase in earnings (currently 2.1%), so the real value of purchasing power is being eroded. Although at an aggregate level, the modest fall in unemployment (36,000) and healthy 118,000 increase in the numbers employed are positive signs, they are not enough to offset the impact on total spending. Such a slowdown is a necessary part of the rebalancing process, as more resources are devoted to exports and investment, and less to consumption.

As the Bank of England Chief Economist said recently, this is not a temporary phenomenon and the pressure on households' living standards will last years rather than months. And the numbers are reflecting the weakness of the consumer sector. While retail sales in April appeared to be robust, an extra Bank holiday and warmer weather were contributory factors. Taking the three-month on three-month change, there was virtually no volume growth in April. The housing market remains stuck in neutral. The number of mortgage approvals edged down in April and there were mixed signals on house prices but even the fastest was slower than the inflation rate.

Subdued consumer activity has been apparent for several years but the change in the economic weather in the past few weeks is accounted for by a swing in mood of industry. With households and the public sector boxed in, the recovery has been led by the corporate sector, particularly companies with a global reach. Recent PMI surveys show signs that output growth is weakening. Manufacturing, at a 15-year high in January (of 61.7) has slipped in each of the four subsequent surveys, a slide confirmed by the latest industrial production figures from the ONS. Although the headline PMI is still above 50 (pointing to expansion), the output and new orders components in May both slipped back into negative territory. Similarly, in the services sector, the headline reading was still above 50, although work outstanding was under this key threshold.

The latest public sector finance numbers offered little comfort to the Chancellor with the new year getting off to a bad start. Net borrowing in April (excluding financial

Interventions) came in considerably higher than expected at £10 billion, an increase of nearly £3 billion on April 2010. The 12-month comparison is slightly distorted by the one-off tax on bank bonuses last year, which kept borrowing down, but the April 2011 borrowing was still higher than in April 2009, and was a new record for the month. The deficit was as much the result of a spending overshoot and weaker tax receipts, suggesting the government will find it very difficult to rein back spending as planned in the Budget.

Strategy questioned

As in 1981, when 364 economists (including Mervyn King) wrote an open letter to Geoffrey Howe questioning the Chancellor's tough fiscal stance at a time when the economy appeared to be standing on the edge of a precipice, so 52 economists wrote to George Osborne last weekend urging him to adopt a "Plan B" and abandon his allegedly self-defeating deficit reduction plans because the economy was too weak to take the additional pain. Osborne responded as Howe did 30 years ago, and in 1981 the Chancellor's stance was fully justified by subsequent events.

The IMF has weighed in with qualified support for the Government's policy. Dismissing calls for the Chancellor to change direction, it acknowledged the risks to growth and argued that if any additional stimulus was needed it should come in the form of temporary tax cuts rather than spending increases. The IMF recognised that the slowdown in growth and the rise in inflation were unexpected, but also said that they were temporary and did not justify policy adjustments. The OECD, meanwhile, said that 'the pace of cuts should be reconsidered if things turn out weaker than expected'. It also suggested interest rates should rise this year.

There is plenty of advice available to the authorities from a range of 'experts' that will support any policy initiative the Government chooses to take. At this stage of the cycle, it is what is to be expected. It is far too soon for the Chancellor to think of changing or even tweaking policy, and there is no compelling reason for him to do so. The depth of the recession and associated financial crisis meant that getting back to 'normal' would be either painful, prolonged or both. The arguments for changing course are as much political as economic and at the moment, he can point to market approval for his policies. Despite a worse debt problem than Spain, the UK continues to borrow at much lower rates. As long as growth stays positive, albeit a bit lower than forecast and still below trend, Mr Osborne will stick to his guns.

Policy priorities

This is a no-win environment for the MPC. The Committee is damned if it does and damned if it doesn't. Since Mr King and his colleagues did not change rates a year ago when the inflation threat was evident but growth appeared more robust, they can hardly tighten policy now in response to price pressures when activity looks to be becalmed. It would be a tacit admission that they got it wrong last year and their credibility would be shot to pieces. So, more of the same looks to be on the cards for months to come, allowing the deflationary forces already at work to start to nudge the CPI slowly back down towards the target while the rebalancing of activity continues. Continued low interest rates will act as the safety valve while the government sticks to its plans to restructure the public finances. A slow process, with inevitable casualties, but any Plan B implies a dilution of the current stance and therefore a prolongation of the pain. "If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly."

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Welcome New Members

This month I am pleased to introduce you to:

Scoopermarket

Retailer of dried food (new business opening soon)

David Amies (owner)

4 John Trimmer Walk, 63A High Street,

Alton, Hampshire. GU34 1AB

Tel: 01420 474727

E-mail: davidamies@rocketmail.com

David's new shop is due to open in July, if I remember correctly. His shop will finally fill the empty shop in John Trimmer Walk, meaning that this little enclave of 'lifestyle' shops can draw-in still further people. On behalf of you all, I wish David success with his new venture. In case you wonder about the name, the idea is that people will be able to 'scoop' up their own dried fruit and grain, just like people used to do in times past.

The Future of Events in Alton

The last issue was devoted entirely to the Jane Austen Regency Week and at the time of writing, we are nearly half way through the calendar of events for the week. There is also the Alton Word Fest coming up at the beginning of October, also run by the Chamber (ACE), not to mention the many other events run by the Town Council and the Lions, to name but a few.

The problem the Chamber faces is that the three-year tapered grant system provided by East Hampshire District Council is finishing this year for the grants we obtained for our events. Pat Lerew and myself are concerned about how our events are going to be funded in 2012 and so far, EHDC have yet to make any positive noises. We all know times are hard, but the events programme has become an integral part of life in Alton.

The retailers recently held their first meeting, chaired by Sanya Ward. Naturally they are concerned about how the coming of Tesco and possibly Waitrose or Morrisons will affect trade in the town centre. One of the ways to get people to visit the town centre is to run events and to hold markets. Regrettably, the trial monthly Saturday "Food Lovers' Market" is not going as well as it might, but the programme of events is something worth supporting.

We have already picked-up on the request by the Licensed Victuallers for a new Town Manager, and with the coming of the supermarkets, this need is becoming all the more urgent. Not only do we need someone to help run events, we need someone to market our events far and wide. The hope is that the supermarkets (new and old) might be convinced to contribute, so a proposal is being drawn up to put our case to them. Watch this space.

Road Works – "Operation Resilience"

It may have been noted by many of you that the roads in Hampshire aren't up to standard. When you enter our county from Surrey on the A31, there is a noticeable change to a poorer road surface and the verges are left to grow tall. In Alton town centre, there are potholes that have been there long enough to warrant a place in the history of Alton! It is something we all moan about, but we shrug it off, accepting that this is the Hampshire way. Apparently this is no longer the case.

If you live in Hampshire, you should have received the Hampshire County Council's "Hampshire Now" summer magazine. Turn to pages 8 and 9 and you'll see a double page spread devoted to this very issue. It is hard not to be cynical, but it would seem that the council has finally realised that patching potholes on an ad hoc basis is not very effective and, in the long term, is not cost-effective.

I seem to remember that a council officer said that it would take 100 years to fully refurbish all the roads in Hampshire. However, nice as it is to see roads with an all-new surface, all we really want is the worst areas attended to. This is what the council have decided to do and their "Operation Restore" dealt with the worst hit areas caused by frost and ice damage; now they are starting "Operation Resilience".

The idea is to "future-proof" our roads they say. It is "an investment in Hampshire's roads for the long term and marks a substantial shift from reactive to planned maintenance." If you don't have a copy of the magazine, see information online at these pages:

<http://www3.hants.gov.uk/roads/operation-resilience.htm>
<http://www3.hants.gov.uk/hantswebnewslist?id=472279>

You may see laminated A4 pages on various posts around town detailing the areas to be dealt with. I glanced at them a while ago and noticed that a lot of roads are listed, but only a general start date was given. There is a rolling programme and as it becomes the turn of certain roads, letters will be going out to the affected homes and businesses. I have been assured that Normandy Street and the bottom of Vicarage Hill by the library are included, but as yet, the county council can't offer any dates.

Linking with Alton Town Council

Our new town councillors have expressed a wish to have a representative for our organisation. It is refreshing to have their interest in our activities and we will be inviting them to put forward a councillor. We have also put forward the idea of setting up an inter-organisational forum to allow ideas to be tabled and discussed with a range of Alton's organisations. The loss of Alton Town Partnership has left a vacuum and we feel that there needs to be some kind of way for representatives of organisations to meet.

Next ACCI events

June 30th – Hampshire Museum & Gallery Trust talk – Allen Gallery

July 28th – Barbecue – O'Connor's Secret Garden Bistro

August – no meeting



TESCO WIN APPEAL

an article by
David Gay

After several planning applications and two appeals against refusal, Tesco has finally got the go-ahead to build a Superstore at the end of Mill Lane and close to Montecchio Way.

There may still be a delay before Tesco commence work because East Hants District Council could decide to make an appeal to the Secretary of State against the Appeal Inspector's decision.

Assuming that EHDC don't appeal or that if they do, the appeal is rejected then we can assume that Alton will soon have a new large supermarket to compete with Sainsbury !

It is fair to say that a significant majority of Alton residents welcome Tesco coming to town. Not only will shoppers have more choice but the expectation is that Sainsbury will up its game to compete, which can only be good.

Currently Waitrose who already have planning consent for a supermarket adjacent to the Station are still proposing to go ahead with their scheme. The shoppers of Alton could soon be faced with the choice of three supermarkets !

Some residents and some retailers are concerned that a Tesco "out of town" supermarket will sound the death knell for our traditional town centre. This is not a view shared by all retailers, some of whom suspect that many shoppers, dissatisfied with Sainsbury, already shop at other supermarkets in adjacent towns. These shoppers may now stay in Alton and use the town centre shops more than they do currently.

Part of the Tesco appeal conditions is that they enhance the local bus connections between Mill Lane and the town centre. This too may prove a benefit in keeping shoppers in Alton.

Other concerns include whether M&S Foods will suffer particularly if Waitrose go ahead but only time will tell.

The challenge for local smaller retailers in the town centre is to keep turn-over (and profits) up in the face of difficult economic prospects over the next few years and the challenge from the "big-boys".

Few of the retailers, if any, can compete on price, so they need to focus on how they can offer something different and how they can make the shopping experience more attractive.

Tesco and Waitrose need the town to grow to maximise their investment and a vibrant town centre is part of the equation. Organisations like the Chamber of Commerce, the Town Council and the District Council can all play their part by promoting the town centre with regular interesting events and Tesco and Waitrose can be encouraged to give their support.

The Chamber of Commerce is keen to have an active town manager, so perhaps the "big-boys" can be persuaded to give their financial support to such a project.

The Chamber committee would welcome members views and ideas on how the coming of Tesco and Waitrose could best be used to the advantage and development of our town.

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THE ALTON SHOW



SUNDAY 3RD JULY
FROYLE PARK SHOWGROUND
commencing 8.30am



In the Main Arena:

Adam's Axemen
Zaporozhian Cossack Horseman
Terrier Racing
Siberian Husky Demonstration
Tractor and Machinery Display
Grand Parade
Harbour pipes and Drums
Hampshire Hunt
Clinkard & Meon Valley Beagles

On the Show Ground:

Cattle - Sheep - Angora Goats
Heavy Horses - Private Driving
Miller's Ark
Craft and Food Marquees
Countryside Skills Demonstration Area
Terrier Racing - Birds Of Prey
Dog Agility Demonstration
Trade Stands - Family Entertainments
Live Music on the Bandstand

Admission To Alton Show - On the Day

Adults £12.00

Senior Citizens - £8.00

Children 5 -15 £5.00

(Pre School Children Free)

(The ticket booths on the show ground will accept most major Credit & Debit Cards)



Pre - booked tickets with a saving of up to £2 are also available from:
The Alton Herald Office, Alton Brock's Farm Shop, Alton
Farnham Herald Office, Farnham & Petersfield Tourist Information Office

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Saturday 9th July

10am - 3pm

A fine feast for all food lovers will fill Alton's High Street once again on Saturday 9th July, when the town's annual Food and Craft Festival takes place.

Stretching from Crown Hill to Cross & Pillory Lane and beyond, the event will include the regular Hampshire Farmers' Market, Lions' Craft Market, the mobile animal farm for feeding and petting courtesy of the Mill Cottage Farm Experience, street entertainers, live music and cookery demonstrations from the town's leading hotel and restaurant Chefs.



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Alton Bus Rally & Running Day

Sunday 17th July Anstey Park

All Day



The Alton Bus Rally & Running Day is one of Britain's biggest Bus Rallies & Running Days. The 'Rally' features a large display of Buses and Coaches of all shapes and sizes from a variety of eras and operating areas. In addition there is also a large display of other vehicles including Classic Cars, Lorries, Motorcycles and Vans as well as Emergency Services Vehicles.

The 'Running Day' consists of a network of free bus services operating from Alton to surrounding villages and towns, re-creating the 50's, 60's, 70's and 80's era of bus operation in East Hampshire. Buses also connect with Steam and Heritage Diesel Trains at certain Mid Hants Railway Stations.

From strolling around the exhibits on display in the pleasant setting of Anstey Park, to riding on the free bus services through the beautiful Hampshire countryside and watching or even travelling on the Mid Hants Railway's Steam and Heritage Diesel Trains there is always plenty to see and do whatever forms of land transport you are interested in.

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LAST NIGHT OF THE PROMS



SATURDAY 9TH JULY

ALTON PUBLIC GARDENS 7.3pm - 10pm

Come and join your fellow Altonians for an extravaganza of music !



Bring your Chairs, Tables and Flags, bring your Picnic Baskets and your Bubbly (and soft drinks for the kids) !

..... and bring your voices to sing along with all those traditional favourites !

For more information contact Greg Burt at Alton Town Council

Come and have a great time !

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ALTON COLLEGE MEDIA STUDENTS OFFER FREE COMPANY VIDEO

Does your company or business need a "free" bespoke video production for sales, promotion, training or the WEB?

If so, then Alton College Media Production students would like to work with you.

These students are in their second year of a 2 year course designed to enable them to reach the vocational and professional standards that apply to a range of media practice. The course is very practical and requires students to engage at a high level with ethical and business issues and practices. The course lays much stress upon students' development as professionals who can work under pressure both independently and as part of a team, qualities essential for success in the media industry.

A major unit requires teams of students to work with "real clients" producing material that will have a use beyond being an academic exercise. Last year, among the companies / businesses for whom we made videos were :

Mr Whithead's Apple Juice, Snell , Energique, Liftmaster and NE Hants & Surrey Health

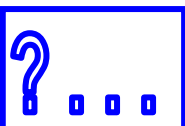
Another successful video, Studioplantscapes, is available on the internet at: <http://www.studioplantscapes.co.uk/>

So if you would like to be one of our "clients" this autumn, please send a brief outline of your company and your video requirements by email to:

Lorne.Magory@altoncollege.ac.uk

As this assignment starts in mid-September, your early responses would be greatly appreciated.

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. . . and finally



Don't forget that there are Jane Austen events taking place up to Saturday 25th June

..... and on Sunday 26th June there is the Victorian Charity Cricket Match on the Butts Green !



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