

# Salisbury Cathedral Close Preservation Society

*"Rus In Urbe"*

Patron: Rt. Hon. Sir Edward Heath K.G. M.B.E. M.P.  
 Chairman: Sir Robin Ibbs K.B.E.  
 Secretary: Mrs Alison Pinkerton O.B.E.

## Letter from the Chairman of the Society

The Gatehouse of the North Canonry  
 60, The Close,  
 Salisbury. SP1 2EN

September 28th 1998

Dear Member

### THE HARNHAM GATE

As many of you will know, the Dean and Chapter are likely in the near future to consider a proposal that traffic through the Harnham Gate at the south end of the Close should be two-way, and that the Gate should be the only entrance and exit for cars and light trade vehicles. The proposal offers significant benefits mainly at the North end of the Close, but entails serious disadvantages at the South end and in De Vaux Place. There are already strong feelings for and against it.

I am writing now to inform you that the Committee of the Society has recently considered carefully all the available information about the proposal and also the various arguments. The Committee decided unanimously that the Society should oppose the proposal. The fundamental reason for the decision was that the proposal would seriously damage the quality of the South end of the Close and hence the character of the Close as a whole. There was also disquiet about its effect on De Vaux Place. In the Committee's judgement these disadvantages outweighed the benefits it might bring in other parts of the Close.

The history of the matter is that at the beginning of this year the main High Street Gate was closed because of work on pedestrianising the High Street. During this period the Harnham Gate was used in the way that is now suggested. As a temporary expedient it was a perceived success with benefits to the north end of the Close although the tranquillity of the south eastern corner of the Close was greatly disturbed. There was also considerable inconvenience and annoyance to residents in De Vaux Place, and there was awkward congestion there at times of peak traffic. However, when the High Street Gate was re-opened, and the temporary traffic lights, the constable's kiosk and various notices were all cleared away, the south east corner of the Close at the Harnham gate became again a very pleasant scene of rural calm.

What is now proposed would entail a permanent change in the character of this delightful part of the Close. As well as much increased traffic there would be permanent traffic lights, permanent notices and a substantial kiosk and other facilities for the constables. Perhaps even more obtrusive would be a proposed new footpath and cycle track joining the Close to the St Nicholas Road. This would be three metres wide, fenced to a height of 1.8 metres and for security reasons, well lighted. Because this land is subject to flooding, this new track would need to be raised and so be expensive to construct.

At this point I must refer again to the benefits the proposal should bring to other parts of the Close. These cannot be lightly dismissed; to reach a balanced judgement they need to be appreciated. In summary they are:

- easier and safer access for the numerous pedestrians who use the High Street Gate;
- better traffic free approach to the Cathedral;
- tighter control of traffic by the constables and parking attendants;

- better control of entry of large vehicles;
- reduced risk of damage to the High Street Gate;
- easier and safer access for wheel chairs;
- better environment at busy times for residents at the north end of the Close.

These benefits are obviously all worthwhile if the price to be paid elsewhere is not too great. However, they are alleviations of difficulties which are long-standing and to which people are largely adjusted, rather than the removal of very serious problems. They are mostly of a kind which will diminish if only the widely acknowledged fundamental need to reduce traffic and parking in the Close can be achieved. The Committee of the Society certainly regards them as desirable but not as being of overwhelming importance.

Even so, opposition to the proposal can only be justified if there are strong arguments that support this line. The basic question is: "does preserving the environment at the southern end of the Close, and certain other considerations including some doubts about whether two-way traffic in De Vaux Place can ever really be satisfactory, outweigh these alternative benefits". There were four main arguments that convinced the Committee.

### 1. The need to preserve the special quality of the Close

The Salisbury Cathedral Close is a uniquely special place of the highest quality, not only in local and national terms but also in world terms. Its architectural variety, including buildings of exceptional merit and interest, its spaciousness and its overall charm mean that it provides a setting for the Cathedral without parallel. It gives Salisbury an environmental jewel at the heart of the city.

The quality of the Close arises in part from the contrast between its northern end alongside the bustling city, and the southern end which has a wonderful tranquillity. The south eastern corner with the cottages and the Harnham gate has a magical timeless quality. Traffic lights, facilities for the constables and a well lighted new footpath/cycle track would ruin this.

Traffic and parking have long been a serious threat to the character of the Close. The Society applauds the desire of the Dean and Chapter to tackle these problems. But the Harnham Gate proposal will do nothing to reduce the volume of traffic or the parking. It will merely distribute the traffic by arrangements that will damage the special quality of the southern end. The relief to the northern end would only be significant during the busy periods (intermittently between 8.00am and 5.00pm) whereas the damage to the southern end would be permanent. There would also be increased traffic at points other than the southern end; for example, the many residents in Sarum St Michael when walking to and from the city would experience more traffic in West Walk which has no footpath.

### 2. The footpath /cycletrack

The Society has great concern about the suggested footpath/cycletrack, it would be an obvious further change to the rural atmosphere of that part of the Close. Even if it were well built with secure fencing and good lighting it would inevitably still be potentially unsafe for children. Encouraging increased cycle traffic coming through the Close is also undesirable. Obviously those who live and work in the Close should be encouraged to use bicycles instead of cars, but the Close is unsuitable for through cycle traffic. Bicycles which travel silently and at a speed are already a serious danger to elderly residents and tourists, particularly down West Walk where as already mentioned, there are no footpaths.

### 3. The effect on De Vaux Place

Like the southern end of the Close, De Vaux Place also has its own considerable period charm. The changes that would have to be imposed to enable two-way traffic to flow at all freely would destroy much of this. For example the narrow informal flower garden on its northemside would almost certainly suffer and what is at present a pleasing exit from the Close would become another very narrow suburban road with an awkward and dangerous further narrowing at the Harnham Gate which is awkwardly angled. There is no clear view through the Gate, and when there was two-way traffic at the

beginning of the year it was noticeable that some motorists, when no constable was on duty, very dangerously jumped the traffic lights. The residents of De Vaux Place who experienced the temporary arrangements at the beginning of the year are understandably against the proposal. Although the Committee's main objection to the proposal is environmental damage to the south eastern corner of the Close, it regards the concerns about De Vaux Place as certainly relevant.

4. The cost of creating the proposed arrangements

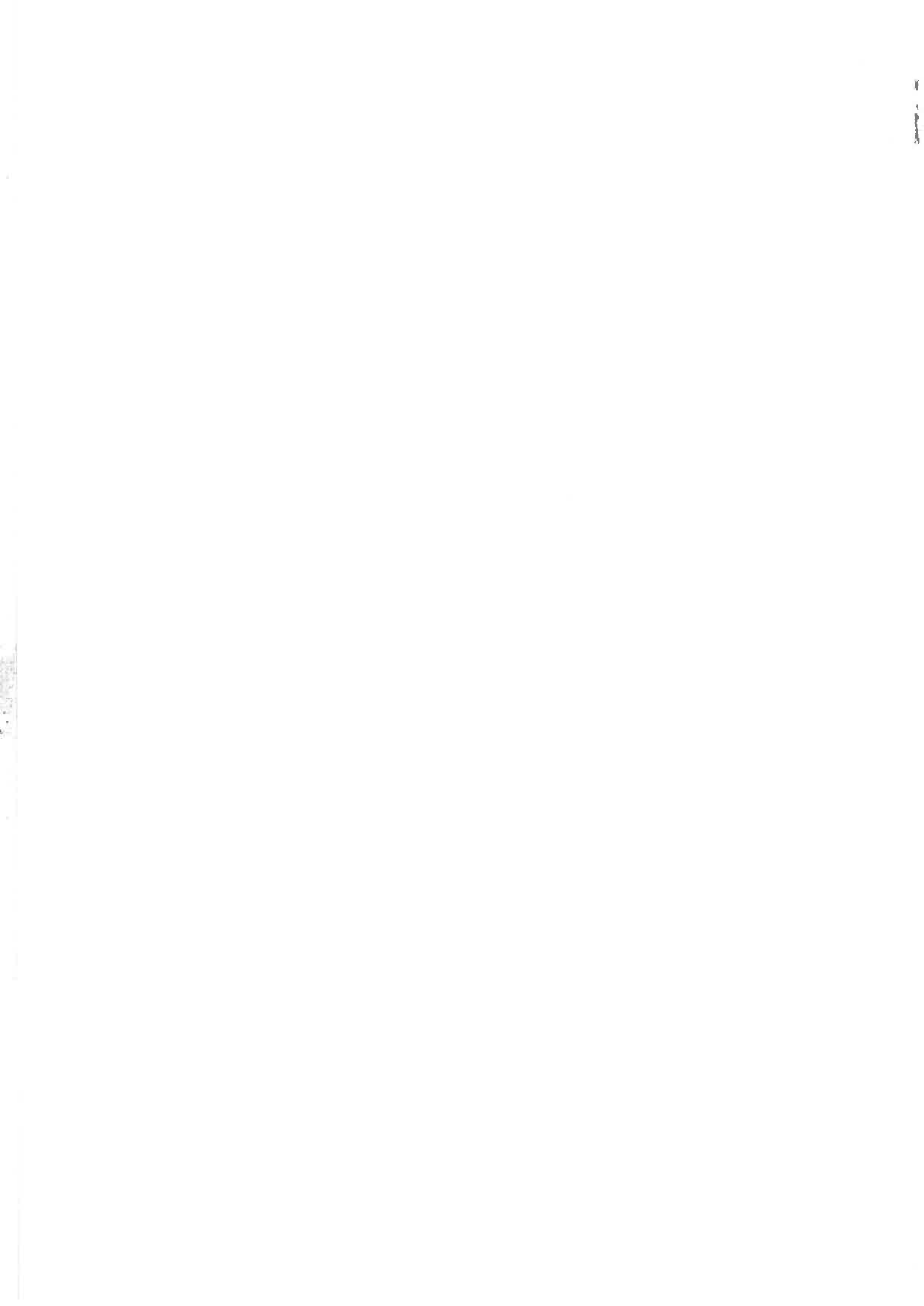
The Society understands the financial pressures on the Dean and Chapter and that demands on their limited funds exceed the money available. Against this background the cost of creating the proposed arrangements would be significant. In particular, because the land is subject to flooding and is a quagmire during part of the year, the cost of the suggested footpath/cycletrack would be substantial. The Society doubts whether the scheme which would damage the character of the southern end of the Close, and which is inevitably also contentious because of its effects on De Vaux Place, could merit high priority compared with other demands for the available funds.

For all the above reasons the Committee of the Society, having tried to maintain a proper balance in considering the not inconsiderable benefits for the northern end as well as the drawbacks for the southern end, were convinced the proposal should be opposed. I hope that a majority of the members of the Society will agree with this judgement. Whatever your view I shall, of course be pleased to hear from you; not least from those who live beyond Salisbury who may have a more detached view than those of us who are nearer to the issue.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Ibbs', written in a cursive style.

Sir Robin Ibbs Chairman SCCPS



**Letter from the Chairman of the Society**

**The Gatehouse of the North Canonry  
60, The Close,  
Salisbury. SP1 2EN  
October 19th 1998**

Dear Member

**THE HARNHAM GATE**

I wrote to you on 28th September about the proposal to make the Harnham Gate the only entrance and exit from the Close for cars and light trade vehicles. I am now writing again, this time to seek your help. My earlier letter has prompted numerous replies; all of these, except one, have very positively supported the line taken by the Society's Committee. This is extremely encouraging.

You will recall that the Society's Committee believed that the benefits which the proposal would offer at the north end of the Close would be outweighed by the importance of not damaging the rural tranquillity at the southern end, which is such an essential part of the unique quality of the Close as a whole. As I said before, the cottages in the south east corner, and the Harnham Gate itself, have a magical timeless quality which would be shattered by traffic lights, a new building for the constables and periodic lines of cars queuing to leave the Close. The effect on De Vaux Place, which is anyhow too narrow to be satisfactory for regular two way traffic and where exhaust fumes tend to hang heavily on the air, would be devastating, not least for the residents there. A suggested new well lighted footpath/cycle track from St Nicholas Road would further shatter the rural atmosphere that is so greatly valued. These objections are not speculative. Experience during the first part of this year when the High Street Gate was closed, provided ample evidence.

We now know that in the near future the proposal will be formally considered by the Dean and Chapter and by the District Council's Planning and Economic Development Committee. The people who will have to take the decisions will need to know the strength of feeling on the matter. I therefore hope that as many of you as possible will write to the two addresses shown below. A short note clearly expressing concern and opposition will suffice.

I recognise that, despite the encouraging response to my last letter, some members may like the idea of having two-way traffic at the Harnham Gate. I should be grateful if those who do would let me know at the above address, so that I can keep under review the extent of any division of opinion on this matter within the Society.

The addresses to which other letters should be sent are:-

The Very Reverend D Watson  
The Chapter Office  
6, The Close,  
Salisbury. SP1 2EF

Councillor R J Hardy  
The Council House,  
Bourne Hill,  
Salisbury. SP1 3UZ

I do want to emphasize how much the Committee and I will appreciate any help you can give in this way to preserve the quite outstanding overall quality of the Close.

Yours sincerely

Sir Robin Ibbs Chairman SCCPS