

THE HARPENDEN SOCIETY COMMITTEE MEETING
Monday 13 Jan 2025 at 10.00 a.m.
HTC Council Chamber
MINUTES

1. Present

Jeff Phillips (JP), Martyn Reed (MR), Paul Gloess (PGs), Karl Wingfield (KW), Ian Barrison (IB) and Bob Fletcher (RF).

2. In Attendance

Roger Butterworth (RB).

3. Apologies for absence

These were received from Harry Downie (HD, Ron Taylor (RT), John Lowe (JL) and Alan Bunting (AB).

4. Past Meeting Minutes

Minutes of the meeting on 11 November 2025, previously circulated, were approved as a true record.

5. Matters Arising from Minutes

JP reported that he had sent a reminder to Paul de Kort to his original email enquiring who is the HCC infrastructure person to invite to a future meeting.

6. Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer's Report had been circulated by HD prior to the meeting. There were no questions raised regarding this report.

7. Secretary's Items.

(a) Public Meetings: The next public meeting is on the 21st January when Paul de Kort has agreed to give an update on the state of the Local Plan.

(b) Other possible meetings include:

- I. inviting local farmer Stuart Roberts to talk about the constraints of farming in the greenbelt – possibly in March 25. **Action RT to send out invitation**
- II. inviting our MP, Victoria Collins, to give a one-year update on what she has achieved – possibly in October 2025. **Action: JP to send out the invitation**
- III. inviting the CEO of the Community Health Trust to talk about keeping people out of hospital, maybe linking it with the work being done by the PCN,

8. Chairman's Items.

(a) The Chairman's report had been circulated to all committee members prior to the meeting.

(b) JP reported that to quote from Daisy Cooper's and Victoria Collins' recent letter to Angela Rayner – "Developers and landowners have identified 355 separate Green Belt sites across our district on which they want to build – that's a total of more than 57,000 homes they are seeking to build on our precious countryside".

(c) Right now, we have two major proposals being developed for planning applications, Crest Nicholson in Batford and L&G/Cala Homes at Cooters End for a total in excess of 1,000 potential dwellings. The impact of these schemes, if they are allowed to go ahead, also means that the impact of construction period alone is being quoted by both parties as lasting in the region of 4-6 years, starting in 2026. These two projects represent c.70% of the total housing build foreseen in Harpenden in the current version of the Local Plan that was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate before Christmas.

- (d) Furthermore, apart from outlines for primary schools and GP surgeries/community buildings, the other infrastructure impacts have little or no detail or mitigation in either proposal that we have seen. And as we are now experiencing with the Cadent work on the A1081, the L&G idea of one-way traffic control under the Nickey Line Bridge is clearly nonsense.
- (e) On top of these, we have a new regime about to be announced for parking in the town centre, with no recognition of the need for a proper parking strategy that addresses current needs....and the likely impact of up to 4,000 new residents on the edge of the town itself over the next several years.
- (f) However, we know we need more housing provision, not least because that the population of the town has hardly changed over the last 25 years. Whatever projects get approved, the community has to be able to cope with the impact.
- (g) Also, infrastructure must be improved substantially, with funding available, before any major scheme is granted permission. The sheer volume of construction and its impact on our community has yet to be factored into these proposals.

9. **Membership Secretary's Items**

The Membership Secretary's report had been circulated by PGs prior to the meeting. We have 499 (was 497) memberships, 3 new memberships, 1 leaver (moved away)

10. **Newsletter Editor's Items**

In AB's absence RT that he was planning on a New Year's edition to be published in late January.

11. **Publicity**

The publicity report had been circulated by RT prior to the meeting. There has been good pre-event coverage of the Public Meeting for Jan 21 at KWS. Information about the meeting was in the Herts Ad, in the St Albans Times, in Harpendia, and A4 posters were put in Harpenden shops and the library plus A5 posters on HTC Notice Boards.

12. **Social Media**

- (a) The Social Media report had been circulated by MR prior to the meeting. Regular postings are being made to the Facebook and Nextdoor sites.
- (b) MR reported that following feedback from members who, for whatever reason missed the earlier promotion, the Society has decided to extend the entry deadline for the Photography Competition by 3 months, to Sunday 30 March 2025, and to simplify the entry criteria. All entries that have already been received will be considered and do not need to be resubmitted. Other than the image being unmistakably of Harpenden, and the photographer being a resident of Harpenden or our surrounding villages, including Redburn, Wheathampstead and Kimpton, there is no restriction as to who can enter, or how many images can be submitted.

13. **Awards**

AWARDS 2024. The Society will be launching this campaign in the next edition of the Newsletter together with press releases across all local media.

14. **History Society**

The History Society report had been circulated by RB prior to the meeting. Items included:

- (a) With our 20 April 2024 event receding into history, we are improving and getting more organised on "business as usual" activities:
- (b) Evening talk in November 2024 attended by 125, which is a record.
- (c) 5,000 copies printed (over half distributed) of glossy flyer with general information on the Society for 2025, including talks programme for 2025.

- (d) Third 3-month special exhibition in the museum just launched – From Village to Town – late Victorian and Edwardian developments.
- (e) December newsletter for members well received.
- (f) David Keen has stood down as curator; Pamela Doran has taken his place.
- (g) HTC has started an arts and culture forum to promote arts and culture societies in the Town. EMC are involved.
- (h) The work of the HTC conservation area character statement working party, including Harpenden Society and Harpenden & District Local History Society, is progressing, aiming to complete mid-year. The output will be very much historically led.
- (i) We still need more volunteers to take on key roles.

15. Transport Working Group

(a) Luton Airport

KW reported that the DCO decision has been postponed again, until early April (although they've said they'll make a decision earlier if they can). The reason given is to allow the new SoS to get up to speed. Maybe, but, in the background, Heathrow have been seeking government support for its 3rd runway project and consenting Gatwick and Luton will make it harder for Heathrow to argue it won't breach legal emissions targets as overall passenger capacity with the 3rd runway will exceed the original forecasts for traffic (figures which have since been rolled back). Also, it would mean further concentration of passenger capacity in the south east at the expense of anywhere north of the Watford Gap – not entirely sure what government policy is for the regions but further concentration in the south east isn't good news for the rest of the country.

(b) Airspace change

The consultation finished pre-Christmas so we're now waiting for the conclusions and proposed actions and timetable(s). Luton Airport still want to make some minor changes to airspace that don't impact other airports so we might see these come through sometime this year.

(c) Parking in Harpenden

KW reported that we're now waiting for SADC to announce its decision but the fight isn't over. The fact that it's Harpenden centric and no-one in Harpenden supports the proposals will linger long in residents minds. A FoI request has been submitted about the car park finances as we need some transparency over those, at least.

(d) Transport in Harpenden

A meeting is being organised for the end of the month. KW is away for this so JP and MR will represent the Society. Hopefully everyone will feel a bit more buoyed to take action on Harpenden's transport issues given the dismissive approach of SADC over parking and the government's proposals for reorganising local authorities.

(e) Walking & Cycling

KW reported that he was going to explore more closely this year the likelihood of Harpenden getting any funding for walking and cycling – part of the rationale for the parking charges is to encourage us all to walk and cycle more but without funding no-one will be "encouraged".

16. Health & Social Welfare Working Group

(a) National Picture

Commented [1]:

IB reported that as usual in Winter the is under severe pressure due to lack of out of hour's primary care services, and NHS 111 algorithms driving patients to A&E. East of England Ambulance services have asked for GP support when they answer emergencies which can be handled by the patient's GP practice. Sheer numbers going to A&E result in long delays for treatment in some cases.

(b) Local News

After six years, a decision on the future of the Mount Vernon Cancer Centre will be made by an Herts County Council based Joint Scrutiny Committee. The preferred option is a move to the Watford Hospital Site, at a current projected cost of £463 million for the new build, alongside >£1.5 billion for the replacement acute hospital.

A new radiotherapy unit, either at the L&D, or the Lister Hospital, should be up and running by the end of 2027.

Community Diagnostic Centres are in the news. These are based in local community facilities, such as gyms, car parks, shopping malls in some cases, or as standalone Hospital based buildings. There are 165 of these centres running in England offering better and more predictable access to CT/MRI/Ultrasound scanning, diagnostic heart tests, and blood tests.

The only centre open in Herts and West Essex is at the QE2 Hospital Welwyn, and seems to be open only to patients already referred to the East and North Herts Trust.

IB reported that he had asked the Herts and West Integrated Care Board for an update on whether there are plans for other centres in our area, and who decides how patients access the facilities.

17. Built Environment Working Group

The low number of applications for residential extensions etc continues. Set out below is a review of the larger applications/proposals under consideration: -

(a) Solum, Harpenden Station East Car Park

Although Solum anticipated making an application in November 2024, none has yet been submitted.

(b) Land to north west of Harpenden – (5/2023/0327) – Carla Homes

Still pending. The applicants have submitted some additional information showing their proposal for a cycle route into town along the A1081. The proposal is not credible and is likely to cause more traffic congestion. The Society has lodged an Objection to the proposal.

(c) Land to north of Wheathampstead Road – (5/2022/2748)

The Planning Officer has recommended approval of this application for up to 40 dwellings at the next committee meeting assuming it is not called in by the Sec of State as it is in the GB.

(d) Land to the NE of Harpenden – Ref: - 5/2024/1602 – Crest Nicholson

Some members attended a presentation by Crest Nicholson on 7th January which was also attended by David Rankin of Green Belt Assoc and 2 ladies from the Batford Community Group. Crest are planning to submit an Outline application in near future but only in relation to the land they own, rather than including the other 4 parcels of land owned by other developers.

(e) Sauncey View Lodge, Common Lane – (5/2023/2611)

This has been refused but the owner is one of the parties who may include their land with the Crest Nicholson scheme.

(f) The Black Poles around town centre greens

We are waiting to learn whether the HTC plan to keep the permanently positioned “temporary” poles and submit an application for retrospective consent, including whether they plan to reduce the number of poles by increasing spacing.

18. Economic Activity Working Group

- (a) The Christmas Carnival and Lights On event Nov 24 was cancelled due to extreme weather. The consequences of lost trade dented retailers and hospitality consumer spends in the run up to the year end. SALES predictably started a few days before Xmas Day. However, the Southdown Carnival & LightsOn took place on Friday Nov 29 attracting large crowds with a Children’s Lantern Parade, Charity Stalls and retail openings. The ever popular Panto this year was Sleeping Beauty at the EMC.
- (b) Looking forward to 2025. The temporary Bank Hub is now open in the Town Hall with plans for a permanent and larger unit under consideration. A new store (Mandarin Stone) opened on Jan 3 at the end of the M&S block selling upmarket marble floor and wall tiles. A new fitness studio has opened in the Forresters called fit20 which promises to deliver total fitness with just one 20 minute session a week over a full training programme. Manor Pharmacy will be moving into the HSBC location downstairs with the planned date in March. Cotswold Furniture have signed the lease for the ground floor of the Barclays Bank unit with a Spring opening planned.
- (c) Lea Grange Care Home in Cold Harbour Lane opened in the Autumn with 24-hour residential, nursing, dementia and respite care within an environment purpose-built for the practical delivery of high-quality care. Harpenden Springs development in Southdown is progressing with a Spring 26 opening planned.

19. AOB

- (a) A discussion took place about the proposed Unity Authority. The consensus was that the proposal might be of benefit to the residents of Harpenden. **Action: RB to draft a report describing the Society’s view on the proposal.**
- (b) It was also decided that the Society should document its position on such topics as the introduction of the new parking charges and the two major planning applications which have been recently submitted – the L&G Planning application and the Batford planning application. **Action MR to draft Society position statements for these topics.**

Dates of the next committee meetings: 3 March 25, 12 May 25, 7 July 25, 15 Sept 25, 10 Nov 25.

Dates of the next Public Meetings: 21 Jan 2025 (Local Plan).

The meeting closed at 11.30.