

THE HARPENDEN SOCIETY COMMITTEE MEETING
Monday 3 March 2025 at 10.00 a.m.
HTC Council Chamber
MINUTES

1. Present

Jeff Phillips (JP), Martyn Reed (MR) – from 11am, Karl Wingfield (KW), Ian Barrison (IB) Harry Downie (HD), Ron Taylor (RT), John Lowe (JL), Alan Bunting (AB).and Bob Fletcher (RF).

2. In Attendance

Roger Butterworth (RB).

3. Apologies for absence

These were received from Paul Gloess (PGs).

4. Past Meeting Minutes

Minutes of the meeting on 13 January 2025, previously circulated, were approved as a true record.

5. Matters Arising from Minutes

JP reported that he would invite our MP, Victoria Collins, to attend a public meeting in the Autumn with a view to her presenting her views about her year as a new MP with an emphasis on her activities regarding Harpenden.

6. Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer's Report had been circulated by HD prior to the meeting. It was agreed that about £3-4K should be kept in the current (no notice) account.

7. Secretary's Items.

- (a) It was agreed that the target for the completion of all the documents required for the AGM would be the 1 May.

8. Chairman's Items.

(a) Parking

- I. A discussion took place on the new parking charges in Harpenden. The general feeling was that the implementation had been poor, some of the meters are poorly located with the sun shining on the display so that users can see what they are inputting and there are not enough meters. It is also not obvious that residents can pay by card.
- II. It was agreed that it was unlikely that the new restrictions will be reversed in the short term and the Society's strategy should be to monitor the situation, especially regarding the impact on retailers, and to monitor (and to try to get improvements), in how easy it is to use the system.
- III. The Society still believes the initial half hour "free" period is nonsense, this should be one hour.
- IV. It was reported that some retailers had stated that the impact of the scheme was not quite as bad as they had feared but as the initial period has been the local schools' half term, they want to wait for a complete month without a holiday period to form an accurate opinion.

(b) North West Harpenden site

- I. It was reported that SADC councillors had approved the building of 550 homes on the site, despite the objections from Paul de Kort and 3 other officials, even though the currently unapproved Local Plan had included a far smaller number for this site. The reasons for this approval to get the go ahead were assumed to be the governments' change in the designation

of some “green belt” to “grey belt” and that fact that SADC possibly did not want to incur the cost of an appeal by the developer, especially after incurring the significant costs of previous appeals.

- II. A discussion took place about the Section 106 funding that may be raised from the developer of this site. The general point was that Section 106 funding goes into a general fund and is not necessarily spent on resolving the infrastructure issues resulting from the development of the site from which the S.106 funds came from. It was agreed that the Society should push to ensure that all the infrastructure required because of this development should be committed to and be built in conjunction with the development.
- III. There seems to be that there is a lack of clarity surrounding S.106 funding and expenditure – who polices this expenditure, why is such a large amount of it not spent? Another issue with S.106 funding is that it may (or may not!) cover the initial costs of building the new infrastructure but it does not cover the ongoing costs.

(c) North East Harpenden site

- I. This site may eventually be for 750 homes, but the current application is for 550 homes on part of the site. It was felt that any planning application should consider the whole of the site in regard to traffic studies, environmental impact etc.
- II. The North West and North East Harpenden sites represent about 1,300 new homes out of the Local Plan number of 1,500. This could mean that Harpenden’s population will be increasing by about 5,000 people. Additionally, the planned development east of Hemel Hempstead of 11,000 homes will probably also impact Harpenden.
- III. It was felt that little planning had taken place regarding the impact of this huge increase in population on the health and education facilities in the area. Also, there was little confidence that the traffic implications will be dealt with adequately, especially after the woeful performance of the Herts CC traffic representatives during the NW Harpenden planning application.

9. **Membership Secretary's Items**

The Membership Secretary’s report had been circulated by PGs prior to the meeting.

We now have 497 (was 499) memberships, covering 758 names. This includes 1 new membership and 3 leavers.

10. **Newsletter Editor’s Items**

AB reported that in his now 'Editor Emeritus' capacity, he is willing to continue to do what an editor's job literally implies, i.e. editing articles or news pieces provided by others. However, after about nine years he wants to step back from the responsibility of having to generate enough material to fill 12 or even 8 pages every three months. AB also reported that he has endeavoured, over the last couple of years, to try finding either a direct successor, or someone to provide 'editorial support', but unfortunately this has proven to be unsuccessful.

11. **Publicity**

There has been ongoing media coverage on three active subjects: Parking: St Albans Times Jan 30, Batford development site: St Albans Times Feb 13, L&G NW Harpenden site: St Albans Times Feb 20 and Herts Ad Feb 20. Harpendia covered all three subjects.

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 2024 Awards have been officially launched in the Winter Newsletter. Compared to 2023 there seems to be little in the way of nominations. One suggestion is the Care Home in Cold Harbour Lane.

14. History Society

(a) Museum - Special Exhibition

Near 100% open as per advertised schedule. There has been favourable feedback on special exhibition, which changes every 3 months. Starting in June, The History Society will be running two concurrent special exhibitions. Schools and group visits are picking up. Autumn average of 35 visitors per week now 40. Experiment with a genealogist being available to consult on Saturday, 1 March. Two trustees have done the bulk of the research so far. Two others are now involved to assist. More are needed.

(b) Evening Meetings

The historic attendance is: Autumn 95, 105 and 125 increasing to 135 in January, which is the limit for Room 1 at EMC. Plus, facilities poor in this room.

Accordingly, the History Society upgraded from Room 1 to the auditorium for the 25 February meeting and put greater effort into marketing. Rebranded from "Monthly talks/members' meeting" to "Public Lecture". The mayor came and spoke. 150-160 attended, including £220 raised in £5 per head visitor receipts; plus 5 new members joined at the evening.

In terms of attendance, the History Society has overtaken the two Arts Society.

15. Transport Working Group

(a) Luton Airport

Gatwick's expansion decision is due by the 27th February. The government has now backed Heathrow (and Heathrow say they'll be making an application in the summer).

Airbus recently pushed out the date by which hydrogen powered planes will enter service and said there's little prospect of commercial services on the scale required by Net Zero targets being achieved. That said, one wonders if Net Zero will survive the US president's rallying cry of "Drill, baby, drill" and the prospect of countries withdrawing from climate commitments.

What all this means for Luton is difficult to gauge – with Net Zero, Phase 2 (the expansion to 32 million) is increasingly risky economically (due to the likelihood of further constraints being placed on passenger growth to meet Net Zero targets) but without Net Zero (or more likely a modified Net Zero) it's anyone's guess, depending on the redrawn parameters but it is suspected that any potential investor will want more certainty before committing funds (and by that time Stansted and Gatwick, if consented, will be fully operational, with longer runways and better transport links). That said, if the DCO is consented Phase 1 (up to 23 million) will happen.

(b) Airspace change

This is still waiting for feedback on the pre-Christmas consultation.

(c) Parking in Harpenden

The charges were implemented last Monday. Difficult to say whether there's been any immediate impact due to holidays, but early indication is that there are a lot of empty spaces (might not have been helped by roadworks though).

(d) Transport in Harpenden

The Transport in Harpenden meeting was postponed.

(e) Local cycling and walking

Harpenden has been overlooked again in the latest round of Active Travel Fund allocations to Hertfordshire, it was thought that maybe they're satisfied that L&G's commitment to funding part of the North West Harpenden A1081 project is the equivalent so no allocation is required.

16. Health & Social Welfare Working Group

(a) New Hemel Health Campus- progress

A Programme Director is being recruited to drive the development of the new health hub, working with Dacorum Borough Council, Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board and West Hertfordshire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust.

The three organisations have joined forces to explore opportunities for bringing hospital, GP and community health services into a new health facility that would allow them to work together to support the local community in a more holistic way.

Options being developed include the proposed relocation of services currently provided at Hemel Hempstead Hospital to a new town centre health campus as part of a regeneration plan for the Market Square area. A high-level feasibility study was carried out and established there was a strong strategic case to move forward with the proposal. As a result, the partners are funding the next stage of developing a business case.

Funding for the scheme is not related to the rebuilding of Watford General Hospital, which has been approved by the government and will be paid for from a different programme. Work is underway to appoint advisors with the necessary technical expertise to write a strategic outline case. The Hemel site could be a valuable property development with monies from the sale accruing to the Trust.

The West Herts Trust has significant uncertainties which affect health care across the area. The delay in starting to build the new Watford hospital (2032 onwards), the delay in the Mount Vernon Cancer Centre decanting to the Watford site, and the rather grandiose scheme for Hemel, all have financial and logistical problems.

(b) Harpenden Primary Care

Residents have expressed considerable concern about the impact of the now approved North West Harpenden, Cooters End Lane, development, on access to GP surgeries. The relevant paragraphs from the information presented to the SADC planning committee last week-is as below:

"The new residents living within the proposed development would increase demand for healthcare services within the locality. However, the ES notes that even if all the future residents of the proposed development were to use the healthcare services in Harpenden, this would equate to approximately 1,540 patients per FTE GP, which is still be below the national average of 1,782 patients per FTE GP.

The NHS Hertfordshire & West Essex ICB has considered this planning application and has requested financial contributions to provide additional resources to existing surgeries so that they can absorb the significant demands from the anticipated patient registrations arising from the new development. The total contribution requested is £919,380. Subject to securing the appropriate financial contribution, the impact on healthcare provision would be mitigated and on this basis, NHS Hertfordshire & West Essex ICB does not raise an objection to the proposed development. The proposal would therefore comply with Policy SI7 of the HNP in this regard.”

The Society thinks that it is important to establish whether the assumptions in the two paragraphs above are correct, and the Health Committee member has therefore written to the Clinical Director of the Harpenden PCN for confirmation. The Society can't find any evidence that the local NHS Trusts are currently looking at the possible increases in population in the Harpenden and east Hemel areas in their forward planning.

(c) Section 106 Funding

It was reported that Acute Trusts can't apply for S.106 funding as it is assumed that the new patients were cared for at another trust previously and the funding of the new trust will be adjusted to reflect the change as the new patients start to use the services.

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

Conditional Outline approval granted – despite great concerns about the process.

(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 green belt. The application relates only to access arrangements.

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

The Council have determined the Scoping Application, and CR will now have to submit a detailed Environment Impact Assessment with their Planning Application to address the issues which are “Scoped In”. However, this scheme is a “Trojan Horse” and is mis-leading. CR have only dealt with the land they own – up to 520 dwellings plus 60 care bed spaces – but their master plan illustrated inclusion of additional land owned by others which could increase density to circa 750 units. This will have wider traffic/infrastructure implications as it would involve Common Lane, rather than the single access road CN shown from Lower Luton Rd near Bowers Heath Lane junction.

(e) Land to South of Bowers Heath Lane – Ref 5/2024/2214

A Change of Use application to form a small travellers' site on current riding stables land. It has attracted many objections from the public citing inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The Town Council have also recommended refusal. The site is relatively insignificant and well screened but clearly there are wider unspoken concerns. An objection has been lodged on behalf of the Society on green belt grounds. There is a rumour that the applicants have acquired a larger adjoining field which they may wish to use to expand.

18. **Economic Activity Working Group**

RT reported that Manor Pharmacy moved into the HSBC location downstairs in mid-February. The Cotswold Furniture store is progressing well with shops fitters active. Harpenden Springs development in Southdown is progressing with a Spring 2026 opening planned. The Southdown Industrial Estate is in a very poor state across two thirds of the site. A poor reflection of what our Neighbour Plan strategy states

19. **AOB**

A discussion took place about the impending move to a Unitary Authority. It was agreed that a working party (JP, RB and MR) will produce a paper reflecting the Society's position on this topic. This paper will be based on RB's briefing paper (which was sent to the committee before the meeting). **Action RB, JP, MR**

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

Dates of the next Public Meetings: Being organised.

The meeting closed at 12.05.