



## Society donates to fight airport expansion

Harpenden Society committee members have voted to give substantial financial support, by way of a donation, to the well-organised campaign by pressure group LADACAN, to fight plans for an expansion of Luton Airport operations. In view of the impact that further growth would have, by way of additional noise, air pollution and traffic disturbance on the people of Harpenden, it was considered a justifiable use of Society funds.

It will support LADACAN's legal and administrative preparation for, and attendance at, the forthcoming Planning Inquiry which will decide on the proposal to expand the airport's capacity to 19 million passengers per annum (ppa) and, critically and controversially, ease a number of conditions imposed under the earlier planning consent allowing 18m ppa, principally in relation to noise, but also car parking, 'travel plan' and 'approved plans and documents'.

The decision by Luton Borough Council (LBC) to approve London Luton Airport Operations Limited's (LLAOL) application last December was, after considerable pressure from local politicians, local authorities and pressure groups including the Harpenden Society, called-in for scrutiny by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, a cabinet post held, at the time of writing, by Greg Clark. In consequence the application has to be decided by the Government's necessarily independent Planning Inspectorate (PI), rather than the inevitably conflicted and biased LBC.

There is now an opportunity to persuade the PI that this application is without merit, in turn making it very difficult for the airport authority's tabled Development Consent Order application to further increase capacity hugely to 32 m ppa, generating around 70% more flights. In order to ensure a robust case against expansion, LADACAN (on behalf of most local pressure

groups) and the four key district authorities in Hertfordshire, Herts County Council as well as the CPRE (Council for the Protection of Rural England) have already submitted written representations to the PI.

LADACAN has also instructed Paul Stinchcombe QC to produce a concise, legally sound and helpful draft Opinion aimed at formulating a strategy for the Planning Inquiry. Stinchcombe has highlighted those areas in which the LBC and the airport expansion plans are legally vulnerable.

They include: 1) LBC's obvious vested interest, bearing in mind its crucial financial dependence on the airport; 2) the airport's repeated breaches of conditions currently in place, especially relating to noise; 3) LBC's admission that the proposals are in breach of its published statutory Local Plan; and 4) a failure to prove need and demonstrate benefits.

In Stinchcombe's view recent cases concerning other airports indicate that other lines of attack, regrettably including climate change issues, are unlikely to be successful when tested against overall government policy favouring airport growth, in the face of overwhelming evidence of aviation's substantial contribution to global warming.

By mid-June LADACAN had raised £36,000 for its fighting fund, donated by its members and other local pressure groups (and had spent £18,000 on Counsel and other expert advice).

It is proposed to circulate a similar request to Harpenden Society members, whose contributions will be matched pound for pound by STAND (St Albans Aircraft Noise Defence). Donations are being processed through the West Herts Environmental Foundation, a registered charity, to facilitate Gift Aid application.



# Summer Carnival June 18- Our best stand ever



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'Superheroes' was the Carnival theme this year, so after a two year absence the Harpenden Society decided to make a real impact. We doubled the stand size of previous years to enable a bigger 'presence' facilitating fun and games with issues of strategic importance recognised by the Society.

The stand was located in a great position and with the help of the local Scouts (3rd Harpenden Scout group) who supplied and installed the marquee we had our best ever looking stand.

**We created two free -to -enter competitions to attract visitors to the stand.**

A **QUICK DRAW** art competition to draw a superhero, with 3 age categories.

All art materials supplied. The owner of local art gallery

Molasses House reviewed the art at the end of the day, selecting a winner for each category, then framing the picture for presentation a week later. Winners also received a £15 gift card from Harpenden Books.

*Gallery owner Barrie Woolston with one of the winner's framed artworks.*



**TARGET PRACTICE** competition throwing bags of Jelly Babies onto mini stands of variable points value. Points being recorded and prizes awarded to the highest scores. These being delivered to winners a week later.

**Prizes, donated by local businesses inc.** Earrings from Loveweds; Sunglasses from

Oui; Books from Harpenden Books; Vouchers from Brad&Dills; Scented candle from Lister Interiors; Chocolates from Perry Florist; Vouchers from Ripples, The Forge Boutique, Threads, Coppers Boots And Shoes; iPhone shell cases from Fonehouse; A cricket set from Good Sports.



A key section of the stand featured images of recent Society activity to demonstrate our involvement in the Town's affairs. Committee members shared time slots during the day to chat with visitors and encourage new membership on the day.

The 'FREE' offer on the day worked well attracting 12 new members.

**Whilst the poor weather didn't help with footfall all stand volunteers expressed positive views and being a participant in the Town Council's major summer event helped to position the Harpenden Society as a key player in the Town's activities.**

# TRIBUTE

## Michael Weaver

One of Harpenden's best-known local businessmen, who held a special place among the town's retail traders, Michael Weaver passed away in early June, at the age of 83. A long-standing member of the Harpenden Society, Mike took a close interest in local affairs, across St Albans District as well as in what became, in the late 1960s, his home town, when he acquired the already established business of C&A Builders' Merchants, in which his father was already a shareholder.

Having grown up in the Hampstead area of London and trained in the City as a Chartered Accountant, it was a totally new kind of professional life for him, namely that of a shopkeeper. But Mike took on the challenge in the cheerfully robust spirit with which he came to be identified through the ensuing decades. He ensured that C&A moved with the times, for example placing more emphasis on its role as a retail ironmonger and hardware store.

During his time as managing director of C&A, which included a spell as chairman of Harpenden Chamber of Commerce and later as Town Mayor, one of the defining events was the disastrous fire which in 1974 gutted the firm's extensive warehouse buildings behind the main shop (the site of two historic Harpenden breweries). It could have meant the disappearance of C&A from the High Street, but Mike Weaver's unbridled optimism, along with a positive overdraft response from Barclays Bank, brought its healthy survival.

After two or three months of repair and renovation, the business was up and running again, albeit with much of the retail operation transferred to the refurbished buildings at the rear. In simple terms, in Mike Weaver's own words, 'it meant turning a warehouse into a shop', which at the same time came to include a small garden centre.

Though Mike's monumental efforts were successful in rebuilding the C&A business after the fire, he was however only a leaseholder of the Brewery House site and a crunch situation arose when the lease expired in 1988. The freeholder wanted to capitalise its assets in a deal allowing a massive extension of the adjacent Sainsbury's supermarket.

Fortuitously, the prominent Kingston House site on the other side of the High Street had become vacant and, undaunted, Mike began negotiations to relocate C&A in what were more compact premises, though

with shop floorspace on two levels, including the area he turned into a café above the next-door Ashtons estate agency. Through the 1990s, locally-based hardware stores like C&A found themselves up against ever tougher competition from the likes of national chains such as B&Q. And by the turn of the century Mike Weaver realised that profitably worthwhile trading was getting harder to maintain, and in 2003, to Mike's great regret, C&A closed its doors for the last time.

In the meantime, on a personal level, correspondingly significant events became milestones in Mike's life. Along with friends and fellow patrons of the Cross Keys he got himself in training to enter the newly-established London Marathon, in which he self-

deprecatingly dubbed himself a natural 'tail-end Charlie'. Having got the 'bug', as he put it, of taking part in sponsored charity events, Mike subsequently demonstrated his prowess as a cyclist on several London to Brighton rides.

Mike Weaver's physically active, indeed vigorous, life changed irrevocably a year or two later. Then a married man with a family he suffered a devastating accident at home while he was negotiating a newly-installed loft ladder, which collapsed, taking him

with it and smashing his right foot into the floor. He was told his cracked heel bone could never be properly repaired.

But within weeks his characteristic determination saw him back working at C&A, initially on crutches and later walking with difficulty. Though it was not serious enough in his mind to deter him, aged 62 in 2001, from embarking on his 'big African adventure' – joining an organised climbing group ready to tackle the 20,000ft Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. Though he did not quite reach the peak, the mere fact that he took on the challenge, given his physical impairment, astonished everyone.

All those who knew Mike admired his positive attitude in facing what was to be an increasing hindrance to his mobility. That led, in his post-retirement years, to reliance on an electric wheelchair which, importantly, gave him the independence, which he so valued, of getting into the town and talking to the retailers with which he felt such an affinity.

During the recent COVID episode which led to temporary pedestrianisation of Lower High Street and Bowers Parade, Mike Weaver was vociferous in championing the cause of the shopkeepers who were virtually unanimous in calling for a return to normal parking and traffic conditions.

Mike will be much missed in the life of the town and members of the Harpenden Society offer their sincere condolences to Ros and his wider family.



# Helping us all to breathe easier

Members of the Harpenden Society learned at its April public meeting that we could all – especially our children – breathe more easily if greater attention was paid to the not-always-obvious causes of air pollution in our environment. Guest speaker at the meeting was Dr Abigail Whitehouse, from London’s Queen Mary University, one of the country’s leading researchers in respiratory medicine.

She acknowledged that concerns about air quality in the semi-rural area of Hertfordshire around Harpenden were less acute than in more heavily populated and more built-up parts of the country – with central London as the most obvious example, where living on a busy road had been likened to passively smoking ten cigarettes a day.



*Dr Whitehouse: ‘even pollutants from cooking can impair lung function’*

But there were plenty of measures, she said, which could be taken locally that would help our children and ourselves all to breathe more easily, for example: walk or cycle along quieter more traffic-free roads; minimise car use and idling; use fragrance-free and low-chemical cleaning products in the home.

Numerous studies on the effects of polluted air, especially on young children, had been undertaken in different parts of the world, from Malawi to Sao Paulo in Brazil. Dr Whitehouse and her university team had, she said, embarked in 2018 on a study under the acronymal heading ‘CHILL’, standing for ‘Children’s Health in London & Luton’ – yes Luton, on Harpenden’s doorstep!

Asked whether the proximity of Luton Airport influenced the choice of study area, she said ‘not

especially’, adding that increases in pollution level around the airport were attributable more to road traffic concentrations than to aircraft emissions. The CHILL study aimed to find out particularly whether interventions to reduce air pollution could improve children’s lung growth and respiratory symptoms, activity levels and brain function.

In four years it had made ‘tremendous progress’ in collecting data from over 80 primary schools in London and Luton. However, due to COVID-related disruptions, a year of data collection was missed, so CHILL had been extended for an extra year to the Summer of 2023.

Since it started, the scope of the CHILL study had expanded. Dr Whitehouse said it was now investigating how air pollution in childhood left markers on genes that reflect pollution levels over time and could impact cognition and mental health. She added that the investigative process had now widened, enabling the team to measure exposure to heavy metals and to check for COVID-19 antibodies.

During 2022 it was planned to carry out CHILL data collection with Year 7 schoolchildren during the Summer term (as well as a small number of Year 8s, who were among the first children to participate in 2018).

Dr Whitehouse pointed out that in addition to the more acknowledged ‘enemies’ of clean air, even in designated Low Emission Zones, aimed primarily at reducing vehicle exhaust emissions, there were less generally recognised causes of air quality deterioration. Those included, for example, wood-burning stoves and tumble-dryers (emitting pernicious micro-fibres).

Meanwhile, in the confined space of one’s kitchen, the amount of particulate matter (mainly carbon) generated in cooking and making toast could, over short periods, create air pollution impairing the all-important lung function – of children especially – as seriously as that in a traffic-clogged street. Tobacco smoking, particularly in a closed environment, had of course long been recognised as harmful to those nearby as well, even more obviously to the smoker.

Air pollution could be defined as an unacceptable level of toxic gases – principally nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>), sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>), carbon monoxide (CO) and ozone – and solid matter in the form of particulate matter (PM), comprising tiny particles of mainly (but not wholly) carbon, able to penetrate the lungs and impair their healthy function. High levels of the smallest PM<sub>2.5</sub> particle pollution in urban areas had also been found to cause a measurable reduction in weight of new-born babies.

Road traffic had been found responsible for 48%, on average, of the NOx in the atmosphere though with domestic consumption of natural gas accounting for some 33%. Dr Whitehouse identified heavy goods vehicles as a major contributor. She nevertheless agreed with a questioner in the audience that ever more demanding legislated diesel vehicle emission standards in Europe and globally were making major improvements though these would become apparent only as older vehicles were replaced by newer and 'cleaner' variants.

Though her presentation was focussed particularly on the detrimental effects of air pollution on children, Dr Whitehouse drew attention to its more widespread consequences for the population at large. Adults living day-to-day in a poor air quality environment were, she said, more liable to suffer from asthma, type 2 diabetes, heart disease and onset of lung cancer. And for the elderly there was an added risk of strokes and impaired cognition, that is brain function. Though cycling was undoubtedly a beneficial form of exercise, it had been shown that, in today's road traffic conditions, everyday commuting



cyclists were more prone to impaired lung function than non-cyclists.

**Dr Whitehouse concluded her presentation with a plea for governments and local authorities to tighten air quality control legislation, saying 'we should fight for clean air' and 'it's time to start talking and doing'.**

## ...meanwhile, higher heating bills add to clean air challenge

A recent British Medical Association report highlighted the often unappreciated three-way relationship between domestic indoor air pollution, adequate ventilation and energy conservation – the latter inextricably linked to heating bills and to greenhouse gas emissions. Housing is reckoned to have contributed 20% of the UK's CO2 emissions in 2020.

Energy efficiency measures such as retrospective cavity wall insulation and double- or triple-glazing are being urged by the authorities. Though commendable such actions can be seen as cutting 'unintended ventilation', the likelihood of also reducing desirable – air quality enhancing – ventilation needs to be recognised, though the International Energy Agency concedes that quantifiable data are lacking. Meanwhile new homes are now required to be built to a specified high standard of thermal efficiency and therefore, regrettably, airtightness.

Evidence suggests, says the BMA, that people in Europe typically spend 56-66% of their time at home – a figure almost certainly increased during the Covid pandemic. It implies that personal exposure to air pollutants indoors may thus be greater than outdoors,



and further increased by home energy efficiency measures. The BMA argues that home energy efficiency improvements require a concomitant campaign focussing on indoor air quality, leading to guide (ie code of practice) policy and regulation.

Reduced reliance on fossil fuels – now primarily natural gas – for domestic cooking and heating brings indoor air quality benefits. Switching to mainly electric domestic energy is a further positive step. So too is the adoption of much-vaunted heat pump technology. But the energy-cost-versus-air-quality conundrum remains. It is one that has been addressed elsewhere in the world, including Scandinavia, where cold winters have focussed minds on conserving heat while maintaining indoor air quality, through sophisticated, but initially expensive, heat-conserving forced ventilation technology.

# 'I'm non-political' says new Town Mayor

Lisa Scriven's inauguration as Harpenden's 2022/23 Town Mayor follows a year as outgoing mayor Paul Cousin's deputy. Though a first-timer as mayor, she has represented HTC's West Ward as a councillor since 2019. Her local government experience also includes a year on St Albans District Council which, she says, gave her an insight into vital issues beyond Harpenden's boundaries. But as the busy mother of two daughters (now at Crabtree School) she bowed out of her SADC role, notably as a Harpenden representative on the district Local Plan committee, a job which proved exceptionally time-consuming.

Born in Belfast, Lisa then spent a number of years living near Durban in South Africa, before moving back to the UK, initially living in Bournemouth. Later working in London she describes how she and her husband looked for somewhere to settle within commuting distance of the capital. Their search focused initially on St Albans but in exploring the area they one day approached Harpenden across the Common and, as she says, 'that was it!'. And they have lived in the town since 2013. Professionally she is a qualified, and practising, chiropractor.

Though she stands as a Conservative town councillor, Lisa Scriven is keen to make clear that she is essentially non-political and is happy to work harmoniously with her Liberal Democrat HTC colleagues in the broad interests of Harpenden. It is her contention that many voters in the town are similarly open minded about party political affiliations, and are almost oblivious to the fact that SADC is now Lib Dem controlled but that Hertfordshire County Council – like our Town Council – remains under nominal Tory control.

With SADC's Local Plan unlikely to be finalised and government-approved before the end of 2023 (according to planning supremo Cllr Jamie Day), there remains a level of uncertainty which in Harpenden could, in Lisa's view, be to some extent addressed by the town's Neighbourhood Plan.

As secretary of PARC (formerly Playground Action Rothamsted Committee) Lisa remains active in



establishing and enhancing the town's leisure and play areas, principally in Rothamsted Park where, with financial support from the Town Council and the Harpenden Trust, the elaborately-equipped, colourful and greatly admired children's play area was opened last year. Recent months have seen the town's two smaller designated play areas, at Roundwood Lane and adjacent to Wood End School, similarly upgraded, though wholly HTC financed, with attractive new 'child safe' equipment (see opposite).

Other leisure facilities on HTC's agenda which the new mayor looks forward to overseeing include a new skate park and, an important priority during the coming year, a new '3G' all-weather artificial playing area for football or other sports in Rothamsted Park. Somewhat further ahead is the issue of the sports pavilions in the park, recognising that the former cricket pavilion near the end of Orchard Avenue which has been unusable and fenced off for several years, will have to be replaced in some way. The Town Council has tentative plans for any new pavilion serving a wider community facility purpose.

Less ambitious but nevertheless significant HTC projects in the pipeline, mentioned by the new mayor under the 'public realm' heading, include a drinking water 'station' in the Bowers Parade sensory garden and an artistic 'refreshment' of the decorative murals in the pedestrian tunnel near the station.

Although the Harpenden Leisure Centre and the Eric Morecambe Centre are not under Town Council control, Lisa Scriven says she is anxious to ensure that a close liaison with SADC and the management company 1Life, is maintained. In particular HTC, on behalf of the sometimes less-than-satisfied users of the two splendidly-equipped facilities, is eager to contribute where possible to overcome seemingly ongoing operational problems.

It is clearly going to be a busy mayoral year ahead, and Lisa Scriven says she is looking forward to the many challenges as well as the opportunities in the period leading up to Town Council elections in May 2023.

## New Membership Secretary

We welcome Paul Gloess on to the Harpenden Society's committee as Membership Secretary. A former Central London-based international data analyst with BT, he is a graduate of Nottingham University with a degree in Mathematical Physics, and has lived in Harpenden since 1993, when he moved from the East Finchley area. A family man with a son and daughter, Paul has numerous local interests, notably as a member of the Friends of Alzey, which has a particular resonance for him as his paternal ancestors came from Germany.

An enthusiastic cyclist, Paul usually does 25 miles or so, but has embarked on many notably serious rides, including rides from Amsterdam, Paris and – on home soil – Berwick upon Tweed back to Harpenden.

Further augmenting his attention to physical (and mental) fitness is his participation in local Pilates activity. His other interests include membership of Hertford Astronomy Group.

Paul says that, as Membership Secretary, he looks forward to the challenge of attracting new members, acknowledging that there are opportunities to be explored for the work of the Society to be more widely known, especially among newcomers to the town. He would accordingly welcome new member recruitment suggestions.

Contact can be made with Paul at [membership@harpendensociety.org](mailto:membership@harpendensociety.org)



# Top Society Award for EMC

The Eric Morecambe Centre has been voted by the Harpenden Society's Awards Committee the town's most commendable new development to be completed during 2021, worthy of receiving the year's distinctive Society plaque. The conversion of the former Sports Centre building in Rothamsted Park, to create a multi-functional new Arts and Entertainment hub, was judged to be a successful and creative project of which Harpenden can be proud. The EMC was acknowledged to be much more than a replacement for the somewhat time-worn Public Halls, given the new facility's impressive 510-seat auditorium, spacious meeting rooms and a home for a long-awaited Harpenden Museum.

At the presentation ceremony in June, newly-installed Society chairman Jeff Phillips handed the Award plaque to St Albans District Council's commercial and development portfolio holder Robert Donald, SADC being responsible for the town's leisure facilities – which are managed by the 1Life leisure company. Cllr Donald paid tribute to the EMC's architects Space & Place and to Willmott Dixon, the main contractor responsible for the imaginative transformation of an existing building.

Also present were Cllr Anthony Rowlands, outgoing SADC lead councillor for the public realm and his successor in that role Cllr Helen Campbell, as well as members of the Harpenden Society Awards committee.



*Award plaque hand-over, in front of the EMC. Left-to-right, front: Cllr Helen Campbell; Cllr Robert Donald; Harpenden Society chairman Jeff Phillips; Society Awards secretary Penny Ayres; and Cllr Anthony Rowlands. Behind: Awards judge John Lowe (left) and EMC's 1Life manager Jo Ditch.*

## Two more play areas upgraded

Following the spectacular transformation last year of the children's play area in Rothamsted Park – in the wake of the Park's ownership being transferred to Harpenden Town Council – two more play areas, also now HTC owned, have been correspondingly upgraded. New attractively colourful equipment meeting today's standards of safety has been installed at the Roundwood Lane and Wood End play areas on the north side of the town. At both sites improved hard-standing access has also been added, making it easier, notably in winter or after heavy rain, for parents including those with prams not having to negotiate muddy or wet grass.



# Those knotty parking challenges

## a personal perspective from Harpenden Society member Adam Shutkever

Reality must be faced; we will all continue to use cars for the foreseeable future. Harpenden's appeal as a great place to live is reliant on those town centre businesses, doctors, dentists, hairdressers etc being accessed, directly or indirectly, by car.

So, in grappling with the car parking issue, **'What are we trying to achieve and how do the current parking provisions fall short?'** Some of the answers are obvious ones, such as encouraging commuters to use the station car parks – when spaces are available! Arguably less obvious is for much better use to be made of available roadside parking spaces.

Harpenden during the working week is characterised by clogged roads and full car parks, while irritated drivers in their polluting vehicles do circuits of the town in search of those elusive spaces.

And yet, close to the town centre there are certain quiet streets devoid of parked cars. Newsletter readers might ask 'how come?' Part of the answer lies in the Harpenden Residents' Parking Zone scheme. The HRPZ no 2, taking in West Common, past the original Rothamsted Research building and along to the fire station, is an example.

According to a recent response to a Freedom of Information Act request made to St Albans District Council, 50 residents' parking permits were issued for the zone in 2021. Now there are 55 designated spaces in the zone, of which 20 are in the stretch from the start of Leyton Road to the fire station, along which only a handful of properties lack off-street parking.

In consequence, many of the available residents' parking spaces are not used, a fact borne out by my photographs shown here on a mid-week early afternoon. This level of usage – or, rather, 'non-usage' – is entirely normal during the week. Bizarrely, however, parking is prohibited in the zone for six days a week, from 8am to 6.30pm.



Even in a number of the streets closer to the station, parking on Saturdays is permitted and at any other time except 10am to 12 noon.

A hotchpotch of bizarrely complicated restrictions apply at different times and days. The result is bad for drivers as well as for the environment.

A crazy SADC initiative in 2016, to make the whole of the Avenues area a 'residents only' parking zone, prohibiting on-street parking in an area where literally every property had more than adequate off-street parking space. The potentially disastrous scheme was fortunately not implemented, with the lack of overall parking provision in the town being acknowledged.

With Covid-related issues now eased, commuter parking at Harpenden Station remains challenging, the station car parks are often full at mid-week. A sensible response and one that has been repeatedly advocated is for double-decking of some or all of the east station car park, as implemented decades ago at St Albans Station. Alas this is an issue for Network Rail and out of SADC's control. Meanwhile the council's kerbside parking restrictions should be made more logical and consistent.



**Adam Shutkever**

## 'Shared space' idea prompts reactions

Our Spring newsletter took the Lower High Street pedestrianisation controversy in a different, maybe compromised, direction through Chris Marsden's suggestion of cars and shoppers sharing the road space under mutually respected conditions, possibly within a CCTV-monitored 5mph speed limit.

Harpenden Society members' responses to the idea were invited. Among those who duly submitted their views was Clennell Collingwood, who thought the proposal 'imaginative and highly workable' and definitely preferable to pedestrianisation. Likewise Jean Smith who thought it 'a great idea', though she would allow vehicular access only for the disabled.

Glyn Griffiths, proprietor of the jewellers in Bowers Parade, saw things from a contrary perspective: 'do not attempt to fix what is not broken', he said, declaring that 'roads are for cars, walkways are for pedestrians'. He added that shoppers would have room to walk more safely if so-called A-boards proliferating in recent times outside retail premises were banned.

County Councillor for north-east Harpenden Paul de Kort welcomed Chris Marsden's suggestion, saying he would enquire about the feasibility of appropriate signage to denote a speed-restricted town centre 'shared space', noting that such signage has been applied elsewhere including in the City of London.



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## Jeff Phillips takes over as Society Chairman

At the Harpenden Society's 2022 Annual General Meeting Jeff Phillips was appointed Chairman. He paid tribute to the hard work and dedication of his predecessor Phil Waters, who held the post for five years. Jeff has been Vice-Chairman since March 2021.

A Harpenden resident for some 37 years and a Society member for over 20 years, Jeff brings a wealth of experience in local and broader community affairs, with a particular focus on health and education. From 2011 until March 2022, he was a non-executive director, and latterly, deputy chairman of Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust. In these roles, he was chair of the Trust's Audit Committee, and for the last two years chair of the Trust's Performance Committee. Jeff is also co-chair of Governors at the Manland School in Harpenden, and sits as a member of Herts County and Luton Borough Councils' Education Appeals panels.



*New Society Chairman Jeff Phillips (left) with his predecessor Phil Waters.*

## Council backs bank ‘hub’ initiative

With the closure of Barclays’ Harpenden branch now signalled and HSBC’s ongoing presence – as the town’s last mainstream bank – also in doubt, concerted efforts are being made to prevent Harpenden residents and businesses being left without access to full banking services.

As part of an initiative headed by banking industry campaigner (and Harpenden Society member) Derek French, a ‘Harpenden Banking Hub Working Party’, under the auspices – and with the backing of – the Town Council, was formed in April.

Chaired by Cllr John Drake, accompanied by Cllrs Nigel Turnbull and Paul de Kort, with specialist support from Mr French, it held its first meeting in late June, where its core aims were established, namely to ensure Harpenden bank customers’ future ‘access to cash’, as well as to vital bank counter and account administration services, are maintained.

The potentially most promising answer to the threat of bank branch closures, as outlined in this newsletter last year when Lloyds closed its doors, is the establishment of a single ‘banking hub’ in the town, able to meet the needs of customers of all the High Street banks.



*Derek French – ‘a strong case needed from HTC*

As Derek French explains, the Working Party will endeavour to put together a strong case for the Town Council, with declared support from Harpenden MP Bim Afolami, who is independently mounting a petition: [www.bimafolami.co.uk/harpenden-banking-hub](http://www.bimafolami.co.uk/harpenden-banking-hub) to fight for the establishment of a local bank hub. The petition will be delivered as supporting evidence to LINK, the independent network group which connects the main High Street banks (through their ATM cash machine collaboration) as well as to the leader of St Albans District Council. Harpenden Society members are urged to sign the petition.

## ‘Mud beating’ upgrade for Nickey Line

Work has been completed on a 200 yard stretch of the Nickey Line path and cycleway to the west of Roundwood Halt to make it more user friendly, particularly in the winter months, when there have at times been severe mud and uneven rough surface problems.

Dave Abernethy, chairman of the Friends of the Nickey Line group, whose lobbying of Herts County Council succeeded in getting the remedial work done, says it was necessarily a complex undertaking, especially the excavation of soakaway gullies on either side, over the whole length of the upgraded stretch, which were then filled with small-piece rubble.

The main surface of layered material is finished with a top dressing of rolled, crushed concrete, which some dog-walkers and cyclists have commented as being – initially at least – rather too soft in texture. The new walking/cycling surface is 3 metres wide which, says Dave, ‘helps to provide safe passing space for two-way traffic enabling cyclists to overtake walkers without needing to get too close to them’.

Project cost of the remedial

work was £22,750, funded by Section 106 moneys from Herts CC, with its CROWS (Countryside & Rights of Way Service) managing the project. There are no short term plans to extend the new surface, says Dave, largely because further westwards the line is less prone to ‘winter mud’. Meanwhile the FotNL will be monitoring the upgraded stretch to check its durability under the feet and cycle wheels of the many thousands of users a day, recorded in May 2020.

Dave Abernethy says feedback from users of the Nickey Line on the upgraded surface is welcomed by email to [friends@nickeyline.org](mailto:friends@nickeyline.org).



*Soakaway edges combat flooding risk*



*A signal Nickey Line improvement*

# Did You Know? From Harpenden's history Methodists' 138 years at Batford

Batford was built around a flour mill which stood on the bank of the River Lea. In 1884, when the seeds of Methodism were sown in what was then a hamlet, the area consisted of a few cottages housing mill workers and local farm labourers. A Mr and Mrs Josiah Smart and their family lived near the footbridge over the river. They faithfully walked, often more than once each Sunday, up Ox Lane and down Sun Lane to attend the Wesleyan Methodist chapel in Leyton Green.



Recognising the arduousness of their weekly 'pilgrimage', Mrs Henry Salisbury – a member of the Harpenden Church and mother of the renowned artist Henry Salisbury – acceded to Mrs Smart's request to hold open air informal Sunday services/meetings at Cold Harbour, near the bottom of Bower Heath Lane. All went well until Winter arrived, when it was decided to adjourn to Mrs Smart's house. Soon after a Mr and Mrs Drury offered to run a Sunday School. Mr Drury was a signalman at Harpenden East station.

Harpenden at that time came within the the purview of Luton's Chapel Street Methodist 'circuit' and Mr and Mrs Salisbury duly sought financial and other support from Chapel Street ministers and preachers, as well as from more well-known and well-heeled Harpenden Methodists, in setting up a trust, administered by secretary Mr Joseph Lewin.

Eventually a piece of land was bought and a 'Tin Tabernacle' was constructed, and thus a dedicated Methodist church for Batford was born. It housed more worshippers, though they were obliged to tolerate the extremes of Summer heat and Winter cold as well as the deafening rattle of heavy rain

bouncing on the tin roof. Its Sunday School was nevertheless attended by over thirty children.

Afternoon and evening services were conducted by Methodist ministers and local preachers from Harpenden as well as from elsewhere in the Luton Chapel Street circuit. Preachers coming from Luton either walked or came by pony-and-trap, but only occasionally by train to nearby Harpenden East station. A congregation of between 40 and 50 people could be expected regularly on Sunday evenings.

Early in the new century, housing development in Salisbury Road, Batford Road and of course along the Lower Luton Road, and in Marquis Lane across the river, was encouraged by the possibility of commuting (long before that word was coined) from the Great Northern Railway's Harpenden East station. It duly brought an influx of new worshippers. The Tin Tabernacle was sold for £25 and, in 1900, plans prepared by Messrs Anscombe and Franklin were laid for the new Batford Methodist Church building, to be erected by Goldhawk and Son of Kimpton at a cost of £591.

It opened in 1905 on its present site which was then part of the original mill estate, the cost of the land being £33. Mrs Edwin Nott, with willing helpers from Harpenden's Methodist Church, established a Women's Meeting on Monday afternoons. It flourished and eventually became known as the Sisterhood.

Gas lighting arrived in 1917 and an extension to include a church hall was added in 1921. Twenty years later on the night of May 12 1941, towards the end of the Blitz on London, disaster struck when the church roof was hit by one of a stick of incendiary bombs, thought to have been targeted by the Luftwaffe on the nearby Almagam works. The damage was extensive and for some years afterwards before a complete repair could be undertaken, a not-altogether-weatherproof temporary roof sufficed and the church became a wartime canteen for service personnel.

In 1952 the church halls were greatly enlarged and modernised – on two levels, enabling simultaneous social or other events to be held. The church has evolved and continued over the years to bear a Christian witness and service to the locality through regular Sunday morning services and a 'Welcome to All' coffee morning each Friday at 10am. Although worshipper numbers have lessened, the halls are popular for various local social activities including two much-valued toddler groups.

**Acknowledgement : Judy Hamblin  
and Harpenden Local History  
Society**

# EDITOR'S VIEW

Alan Bunting



## Green Belt threat back on the table

It's déjà vu all over again! The threat to build housing on 62 acres of Green Belt farmland north of Bloomfield Road has been hanging over the town for a decade or more. As this newsletter went to press the threat reared its ugly head once again, with a renewed proposal from the Legal & General insurance group, which owns the land, to build at least 550 homes on the site, which extends considerably northwards beyond Cooters End Lane.

Avid readers (the only kind!) of this newsletter will remember in our Summer 2020 issue the detailed report we carried on a public meeting convened by St Albans District Council which gave interested residents the chance to scrutinise the so-called 'North-West Harpenden' plans and comment on them. But subsequent administrative upheaval at SADC, surrounding the rejection of its (already once rehashed) Local Plan, led to the whole issue being effectively sidelined.

A finalised Local Plan is not now expected for another two or three years, which has clearly led to a degree of frustration at L&G, whose bean counters are keen to realise their assets, necessarily motivated by

the knowledge that, with its Green Belt 'protection' removed, the sale value of what is now agricultural land for housing would bring massive profits into the insurance group's coffers.

Apart from the deletion of the previously proposed two-form entry primary school, the latest plans differ little from those shown in March 2020. Transport issues – notably the likelihood of hugely aggravated traffic congestion on the adjacent southbound A1081, generated by 500 or more additional cars demanding roadspace – are played down.

Particularly surreal is the regurgitated notion that commuters especially will choose in all weathers to walk or cycle rather than drive into the town from the new housing estate. And perhaps most fanciful of all to anyone who knows the road (and a direct quote from the L&G proposals): 'A new cycle route is proposed along Luton Road providing a direct route for commuters into the town centre'.

Householders in the town are being leafleted by L&G with an invitation to 'Have your say' after looking at the newly-created website [www.landgharpenden.co.uk](http://www.landgharpenden.co.uk) accompanied by an intended reassurance that 'an in-person consultation is planned for September'.

Harpenden Society members are being encouraged to 'have their say', recognising that, in the L&G proposals, there is no community impact assessment of the effect of a projected 1500 – 2000 growth in the population, notably the increased demand on existing facilities, including rail and road transport capacity, as well as GP and other health provision.



## Leisure Learning re-launch

Harpenden Learning for Leisure, which emerged from the former local branch of WEA (Workers' Educational Association) is re-launching its full programme of courses in the Autumn.

They include three new courses: Aviation History, led by David Keen, former curator of the RAF Museum, Hendon; Garden History by Kate Harwood from the St Albans-based Herts Garden Trust; and City of London History by Murray Craig, former Clerk of the Chamberlain's Court. More details of HLfL and its courses can be found at <http://www.harpendenlearningforleisure.org.uk>

## Library seeking 'home delivery' volunteers

The Harpenden Society has long been a supporter of the town's Public Library, especially in relation to the need for volunteers to help keep the library open on Wednesday afternoons, when it would otherwise remain officially closed.

It is now seeking further help in order to maintain its Home Library Service, which provides books to the housebound and those unable to visit the library in person. It is a service which also relies on volunteers who can spare a few hours a month to deliver and collect books to and from library members' home addresses, the demand for which has, says the library's Sharon Wright, increased over the Covid emergency period in particular, which has tended to restrict personal mobility.

Any society member interested in volunteering should either pop into the library, or call 0300 123 4049

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Designed by Ron Taylor

Published by The Harpenden Society, printed by D2D, Harpenden and distributed by hard-working Society members.