



Closing the Generation Gap

The Harpenden Society has taken to heart the advice of Robert Browning: 'let age approve of youth.' In pursuance of his progressive belief that the Harpenden Society should engage more with younger members of the community, the Society's Chairman, Chris Marsden, has initiated two schemes, one aimed at the youth of the town, and the other at young residents and young parents.

Youth at the Helm

On 17 October the Chairman met with the extremely bright and sparkling leading lights of the Harpenden Youth Town Council. This was set up in 1998 to voice the opinions of young people and, as appropriate, represent their view to the Town Council and others, sometimes organising, practical projects of their own. An Inter-schools talent competition at the public hall on 24 February 2012 is an example. The YTC has some thirty members drawn from the three Harpenden secondary schools and it meets monthly in formal session.

The Society has asked the YTC to test the opinion of the town's youth about issues of concern using the Society's 'Working Group' themes as a stimuli. Brain storming groups in the schools and a questionnaire to a larger body of youngsters are being considered. Crime, misbehaviour and relations with the police; conservation and other environmental issues; transport for those often without cars; health issues, like smoking, unsafe sexual activity, drugs and obesity; obviously, educational opportunities and leisure facilities; the impact of building and planning on the social life of young people; shopping and job opportunities - patently some of the seven areas are more youth-orientated than others, but all are relevant in one shape or another.



Above. Leading officers of the Youth Town Council during their meeting with the Society's Chairman. Right
1 Members of the PULSE group enjoying their discussion

Fingers on the Pulse

On 1 November the Chairman, Chris Marsden, met with PULSE, an flexible and informal group of young residents who meet to discuss the quality of life in Harpenden and assist him in reflecting the views of this important component of the community. The issues raised range widely over many subjects, justifying the Society's establishment of a 'Working Group' construct that covers the entire life of the community. Chris Marsden, the Chairman of the Society, will distil the essence of the discourse and channel it through to the Committee and its Working Groups as appropriate. He will also use it as a base for his next periodic meeting with Town Council officials in the belief that the local 'Neighbourhood Plan' that is in the offing is or should be a bottom-up process and that all the PULSE ideas are germane for consideration under that heading.



Among the suggestions - were 'why are there pedestrian ways for parents and children that are dangerously unlit?' - 'how will the reduced post office deal with unclaimed mail and will the hours for claiming it be user-friendly?' - 'why can't Harpenden have more updated, for example, wooded adventure, play equipment?' - 'why doesn't Rothamsted Park have a cafe or refreshment facilities?' - 'why don't they have a prudent Pelican instead of a perilous Panda crossing at the main road end of Station Road' - 'why aren't the shops open for returning commuters?'

There was also a general plea for a wholesale raising of the cultural atmosphere of the town, with more events, especially on and about the streets and with also children in mind. One suggestion was for the Farmers' Market to be extended across the High Street and for the occasion to be marked by music, the arts, street theatre and a full range of entertainment. New committee member and PULSE attender Tim Riley came up with a mantra that summed up the richness of the discussion and the grand vision lurking just perceptibly behind many of the comments...Give Harpenden a heart.

The Harpenden in Question

being a series of editorial commentaries on important Harpenden issues that should challenge thought and encourage inquiry and action.

3. Youth takes a bow



That title will mean nothing to the youth of today, for it was the name given to an entertainment, organised by the producer Brian Michie, that showcased promising youngsters – and to offer some local relevance it was the show in which Harpenden's own (yes, well, and Morecambe's) Eric Bartholemew met Ernie Wiseman. However, the youth of Harpenden are being invited to take a bow, as the Society's chairman Chris Marsden inaugurates his campaign to see what might be done for the town's young people.

It is surprising how late, in historical time, 'youth' entered the political lexicon. It was Victorian times before the effects of industry on the labour market and allied social factors like universal schooling led to the conception of youth as a separate feature. In general, a gap seemed to open up between childhood and adulthood, with confusion around the onset of puberty and a much less clear demarcation of these social stages.

Thus from the 1880s we note the initial existence of a 'youth problem'. One response was the development of youth organisations, the first of them the Boy's Brigade, started in Glasgow in 1883. The uniform attire and the religious bias was uppermost, but the concept of the youth club, often associated with churches not least because they had church halls for venues, grew rapidly. In 1908 the highly successful scout movement was launched, in part in anticipation of the expected war. Similar organisations were also made open to girls, such as the Girls' Brigade and the Girl Guides.

Especially after World War II that sense of a chasm between being a child and a fully-fledged adult became entrenched and at the same time some of the community disciplines, a number of them inward-looking and censorious, collapsed. Social awareness and, indeed, the very physical change into adolescence came earlier, and, in consequence, the 'youth problem' re-presented itself as an arc in the life-cycle not just between childhood and adulthood but apart from the rest of society. That sense of detachment of disaffected youth from mainstream community, exemplified by a series of fashion-conscious identity badges, beginning with Teddy-boys and then on to Mods and Rockers, Skinheads and Punks and so on, has been substantive over the last half century.

Today some of that tension plays itself out in crime, for the 15/25 age-range are responsible for a proportionately larger amount of offences than the adult population at large, with drugs and binge drinking fuelling much of this delinquency. Through no fault of their own, the current burden of joblessness falls heavily on young people, with youth unemployment currently affecting one on five of the cohort.

It is not suggested that Harpenden suffers as much as many other places, but even if the woes of boredom and ennui and of a feeling of being socially excluded are less apparent in our locality than in the inner confines of our large cities, it still behoves the community to consider the situation carefully. The value of

keeping young people engaged in enjoyable and positive activity as been demonstrated in project after project, to be really worthwhile, especially when the young people themselves are genuinely involved in the construct. Unfortunately, there has never been developed in this country a national network, flexible and encompassing, of such excellence, although there are sufficient examples, randomly located, of successful experiment.

It costs £60,000 a year to accommodate a convicted young offender. The national average per capita expenditure on youth services...in some areas is as low as £20

It is the old bugbear of cure pricing out prevention. It costs £60,000 a year to accommodate a convicted young offender. The national average per capita expenditure on youth services is £60 annually; in many areas it is as low as £20 and that is before the today's cuts had started to bite.

We all remember what the much-mourned patron of our public hall Eric Morecambe might have asked : 'what do you think of the show so far?' And we all remember the answer. The Harpenden Society wishes in alliance with other concerned bodies to make absolutely certain that Harpenden's youth do not think their home town and the facilities it offers are 'rubbish.'

Eric Midwinter

Your comments about this article, anything in this edition or, indeed, your thoughts about the services and facilities of the town are very welcome. Please send to me:
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Visit the Society's website – just google
the Harpenden Society

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Published by the **Harpenden Society**, printed in Harpenden by **Dor 2 Dor**, 41 Hollybush Lane and delivered by our faithful band of distributors, to whom, as always, our grateful thanks.

And here is a special message to our distributors. Our recent efforts at recruitment have given rise to over SEVENTY new members, Fear not that your rounds will be in consequence enlarged. We have also had new volunteers to help with distribution, so all should be well.

Members' Memos - From and For

Memos from Members

Another decent haul of messages greeted the last edition. There was both good and bad news, so let's begin with the bad news.

Neil MacArthur, of HarpendenSkywatch, devoted to criticising the helicopter and aircraft overflights, joined then left the Society because he felt there was 'no momentum' and his group could only back us were there to be 'proactive support for a peaceful, safe and less polluted Harpenden' – a view, as you may imagine, hotly contested by the Society's committee.

Next was the reader who contradicted our 'I Love Harpenden Dearly' front page headline, on the grounds of 'my disappointment with the town.' Having taken early retirement, he asks 'what does Harpenden have to offer? It is an expensive place to live', yet lacks the facilities of much smaller towns. 'It is best personified as smug and unfriendly...it possesses the blandness of outer suburbia', Family commitments keeps him here, otherwise he would like 'to move to a smaller, country town where individuals matter and a sense of community spirit palpably exists...Harpenden needs to be jolted out of its slothfulness...' **The editor would like to hear how representative is this viewpoint.**

Then there was **Alan Bunting**, 'amazed' at the Society award to Breathing Space in Thompsons Close. As approached from the High Street, he opines, 'it is a hideous grey metal and glass excrescence protruding incongruously...it looks like a token addition of the worse kind of 1960s architectural brutalism' **So that's a 'no' then.** It's another issue about which the Society's committee would strongly disagree and add an invitation to Alan to do the positive thing and nominate somewhere that should win next year's award, an invitation, of course, open to all members

Some people do not like the town, its Society or its Society's decisions – the Harpenden Society News is nonetheless proud to provide space for their trenchant and well-written opinions.

There was a flurry of opinions, too, about issues raised in the last edition. The notion of a small taxi rank in front of Sainsbury's continues to divide opinion. **Margaret Cowan** finds it 'alarming that some people thought giving parking spaces to taxis was a good idea', that is, in front of Sainsbury's, and she would encourage the use of the taxis free phone at the store. Next is the knotty question of the High Street. **Roy Hall** – his wife and he 'have lived in Harpenden for 26 years and have no desire to live elsewhere – but is concerned that 'many of our shops are converting to cafes and charity shops. My wife and I fear that the town centre will gradually lose its charm'. You will be pleased to learn, Roy, that the Society have begun serious discussions about the High Street. We hope there will be more in our next edition. Next the matter of affordable housing. **Alan Brown** shared a letter sent to the local MP asking for a tax on money received by householders who sell part of their land for development to go to the local council to help with the building of social housing.

Alan Jackson points out that last time we asked members to let us have their email tag without including our return email address and failed to advertise the Society's website. Editorius culpa, or

Latin words to that effect – both points remedied this time. He thought it an 'excellent idea' to distribute the last edition of **Harpenden Society News** to all Harpenden houses, an experiment which led to a bunch of new members and some volunteers for the seven Working Groups established to monitor the town's services. He suggests a 'viewpoint' space for members to make their comments – Alan commented himself about Neighbourhood Watch and allied matters concluding that the Society was 'moving in the right direction'

Finally, we heard from former vice chairman Heather Bardner that 'we enjoyed your new much updated style of newsletter'; thank you, Heather, while another reader proclaimed 'the latest newsletter is lively, professional, informative, colourful, businesslike and acceptable.'

Editor (thinks) let's quit while we're winning.

Memos for Members -The Next Meetings

Park Hall, Leyton Road. Members of the public and Society members are cordially invited.
8.0pm - 9.15. Light refreshments from 7.30 pm

Thursday 8 December

Oliver Randell, Secretary, Batford Springs
Volunteers

The Batford Springs Nature Reserve; Harpenden's hidden secret.

Spanning the River Lea, Batford Springs is Harpenden's only accredited nature reserve. Oliver Randell's presentation will explain the creation and history of the site and the conservation work carried out by volunteers.

Thursday 26 January 2012

A forum of speakers will answer the question
Whither Planning?
The latest changes in the planning system and their implications, both good and ill, for Harpenden.

Thursday 27 February 2012

Organised in conjunction with the Harpenden
Parents Group

'There's a Place for Us...Maybe'

A forum of speakers will discuss whether there really is a place for all in Harpenden's primary and secondary schools and what might be done to improve the situation.

Thursday 29 March 2012

Annual Meeting and Review of the Year's Work

Out and about with the Harpenden Society

Porters Park takes the Plaque

The Society received several nominations for this development in Porters Hill, Batford. A hard surface multi use games area – MUGA – and the adjoining adventure playground took a determined effort by Batford Community Action Group. A great achievement providing a much needed facility for young people and families in Batford. The Society is very happy to emphasise the part that Batford plays as part of Harpenden.



On a beautiful summer evening, Friday 2 September, members of the Society met in Porters Park to present the Society's top award, the plaque, to Chris Grey (above centre left and Society Chairman Chris Marsden, right) and members of the BCAG. At a small congratulatory party to mark this achievement one or two Society members happily tried out some of the playground adventures and can recommend it for young and old!

Congratulations! Rosemary Horne, Awards Group

Education and Entertainment

A review of Eric Midwinter's talk on 22 September on how a community determines its own social destiny

Holding the attention of an audience for almost an hour without any props or technical support is nothing short of genius. That genius is Eric Midwinter, (below) a seasoned professional who knows exactly how. Start and finish with a humorous story relevant to the content and drop in some more humour during the body of the talk which in itself must have audience interest.



So what could be more interesting than the importance to the Harpenden community of its Health, Education and Law and Order services. Eric's espoused belief that the ongoing and

everyday life of a community determines it's own destiny was clearly expressed with a combination of stories and statistics (national numbers requiring local qualification) As a social historian he used fascinating facts from Victorian times through the 20th century to some more recent research data to highlight society changes and whether the resulting changes have made things better or worse...**Report by Ron Taylor. Read the full report on the Society web site. www.harpendensociety.com**

Restoration versus Retribution

A review of Richard Thomas's talk on 27 November on his voluntary work in the local prison

'Porridge' was the only dish served – and, mixed and prepared by the Society's Vice-chairman, Richard Thomas, it was a wholesome and nourishing dish. It was an optimistic account of how short courses – half a day a week for six weeks – are reducing the number of re-offenders among course members by 50% at our neighbouring prison HMP The Mount, just outside Hemel Hempstead, and at some thirty other prisons.



The evening was, in effect, a well-orchestrated seminar. Composed, measured and succinct, Richard Thomas first described the rationale of the course. Constructed, with Home Office approval, by the Prison Fellowship charity, each course seeks to persuade twenty prisoners, split into five groups of four, each with a helper of whom Richard is one, to acknowledge their crime and its adverse effects and to find some form of restitution as a base for a more responsible life. It is a splendid example of restorative justice over against the barren dogma of retributive justice. With prison numbers at a record high of 87,000 at a per capita annual cost of £40,000, such courses at a bargain price of £180 a head make for a formidable economic proposition, apart from their high ethical consideration. Then Richard, in courteous and sensible fashion, conducted a most instructive discussion with an intelligent and involved audience showing matching levels of informed interest and social concern.

We were left with two main thoughts. One was whether we may find the political and public will to ditch the expensive and failing judicial system of punitive revenge in favour of a far less expensive scheme of rehabilitation. The other was to admire the practical dedication of Richard Thomas, a man who retains an instinctive faith in human nature without ever lapsing into a dewy-eyed sentimentality about its more malign manifestations.

Report by Eric Midwinter

Renewal of Harpenden Society Membership

(Nb, this form may be also used for new members. If you already subscribe by standing order, pass it on to someone you feel may wish to join)

Please complete the form set out below. Payment is preferably by standing order and you may wish to make a gift aid declaration to the Society. Please include your email address.

Please treat the next quarterly delivery of the Harpenden Society News as a receipt for your donation.

Membership Renewal/Application Form (BLOCK CAPITALS PLEASE)

I/We wish to renew subscription to/join The Harpenden Society

Single or Family membershipTitle(s) Mr. Mrs. Ms. Miss Other

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I/We make a subscription of £..... (Suggested annual subscription: Individual £4; Family £5) using the standing order form below.

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Please note that this information is kept on computer, but it is only for the use of the Committee.

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I confirm that I am a UK taxpayer and that I wish The Harpenden Society to treat all donations/subscriptions I have made over the last 4 years and all the donations/subscriptions I make from the date of this declaration until I notify you otherwise*, as Gift Aid donations.

Signed..... Date.....

*Please notify the Membership Secretary if you change your name or address while this declaration is in force. You can cancel the declaration at any time by notifying The Harpenden Society. It will then not apply to donations you make on or after the date of cancellation or such date as you specify.

Notes You must pay an amount of income tax and/or capital gains tax equal to the tax that The Harpenden Society reclaims on your donations in the tax year (currently 25p. for each £1 you give). If your circumstances change and you no longer pay tax on your income and capital gains equal to the tax that the charity reclaims, you should cancel your declaration. If you pay tax at the higher rate, you can claim further tax relief in your Self Assessment tax return.

Standing Order Form for Annual Subscription

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Account NoSort Code No Please pay to the NatWest Bank Plc,

21 High St. Harpenden Herts. AL5 2RY (Sort code 60-10-07) the sum of £..... (words.....)

on 1st. January 2012 and on each succeeding 1st. January, for the credit of The Harpenden Society,

Account No. 28772946. This order supersedes any other order for the credit of The Harpenden Society.

Signed..... Date.....

When completed, please tear off this page and return it to the Membership Secretary :
Mrs. Barbara Ouston, 9 Aplins Close, Harpenden, AL5 2PZ

New Society Restructuring the Society's Work Programme

There have been changes in both the personnel and the structure of the Committee over the last couple of months. For personal and allied reasons there have been four resignations from the Committee, namely, vice chairman and transport expert **Malcolm Howe**, **Peter Barrett**, its very diligent Secretary, **Duncan Bullimore**, **Harpenden Society News** designer and **Caroline Stanton**, minuting secretary and summer events organiser. We thank them for their great efforts for the Society and the town and wish them well. Five members have been co-opted on to the Committee, prior to being nominated at the AGM in March for confirmatory election. They are:

Vicki Evans, convenor of the 'Chairman's Focus Group' (see front page for more on this) mother of two young children and an environmental consultant by profession.

Steve Gledhill, the Society's press and publicity officer, a marketing consultant with a long history of successfully campaigning for and promoting local causes.

Alan Jackson, who will act as Convenor of the Public Order Working Group, a crop scientist of international prestige with a sound grasp of many Harpenden issues.

Tim Riley, father of a young family, director and co-founder of an urban design practice, concentrating on 'communitycentric' architecture,

Ron Taylor, **Harpenden Society News** designer, energetic advertising executive and editor of **Harpedia.com** the online magazine and video channel.

In addition, **Bob Fletcher**, who retires from his full-time work next year, has kindly agreed for his name to be put forward at the AGM for the post of Secretary.

As was described in the last edition of the **Harpenden Society News**, the Committee's activities will in future be generally organised through seven Working Groups, viz

1. Public Order; Convenor :**Alan Jackson**
2. Environmental Services; Convenor: **John Davis**
3. Transport; Convenor: **post vacant**
4. Health & Social Welfare; Convenor (acting) **Eric Midwinter**, who is also **Harpenden Society News** Editor
5. Education & Leisure; Convenor: **Richard Thomas**, who is also Vice-chairman of the Committee
6. Built Environment; Convenor: **Anthony Steele**
7. Economic Activity; Convenor; **Chris Grey**

The other Committee members and officers are:

President; **Ian Fulton**

Vice-presidents; **Keith Jennings** and **John Hunt**

Chairman; **Chris Marsden**

Treasurer; **Arnold Allen**

Membership Secretary; **Barbara Ouston**

Awards Group and Meetings Organiser; **Rosemary Horne**
Committee members

Penny Ayres

Keith Nash

Oliver Randell (Upper Lea Valley Group, ex-officio)

We are still seeking volunteers to join the Working Groups. These are chiefly 'virtual' groups, that is, consulting with and advising the relevant Convenor by email and phone rather than through regular meetings. The Health & Social Welfare, Education & Leisure and the Built Environment teams have already been well supported, but there are plenty of vacancies for the Public Order, Environmental Services, Transport and Economic Activity teams. If you are interested, contact editor@harpendsociety.com

Planning Ahead

Richard Thomas, (below) the Society's Vice-chairman and Chairman of the Harpenden Green Belt Association provides an update on this always complex issue



When I spoke to the Society's AGM, I said that it was not then clear how Government would find a balance between economic growth and protection of the green belt in its changes to planning policy.

Since then, Government has announced that it will continue to protect the green belt. We applaud this. Since Harpenden is encircled by green belt, and there is so much green belt in our District, we should find that large scale development with its strain on infrastructure becomes less likely locally. This will reduce the dangers of urban sprawl and coalescence with Luton or St Albans. At the same time Government is proposing to loosen planning controls with a presumption in favour of development. This has been vigorously opposed by the CPRE and the National Trust.

In my opinion the new policy is weak in that it does not require developers to use up their land banks before they are granted permission to build on green fields. Nor is there to be pressure on developers to build on brownfield land. Such land already has roads, drains, power supplies etc, so the cost to the public purse is lower. And if there a need to de-pollute the land that would be a public benefit. The policy is also silent on the provision of infrastructure for the new houses which are to be built, and on ways to meet the current infrastructure deficit. This is estimated for Hertfordshire to be worth some £1.5 billion.

The new policy is not yet set in stone, so watch this space.