



## Public Halls site redevelopment starts to take shape

A range of tentative outline plans for the proposed redevelopment of the Harpenden Public Halls site were put forward at a St Albans District Council public consultation evening. Held in late November in Rothamsted Research's Fowden Hall, it followed two earlier focus-group 'charettes' at which potentially interested parties were invited to make suggestions as to how the site might best be used for the benefit of the town.

Some of those initial proposals from the public, for example a budget hotel or a multi-storey car park, had evidently been discarded out of hand and were not even mentioned at the later consultation. Early suggestions that the development might comprise two separate blocks were seemingly also discounted. It became apparent that SADC, as the owner of the Public Halls, will replace them with council-owned housing development, that is by a single apartment block, albeit above a ground floor given over to 'community use'.

Just what form that 'community use' might take became the subject of lively debate, with adaptability and flexibility as key considerations, though it was stressed that any functional overlap with the new cultural hub in Rothamsted Park was not envisaged. Commercial activity on the ground floor, regardless of the new development's size and configuration, needed to provide the council with an annual income of at least £500,000, said Cllr Julian Daly, commercial and development portfolio holder. The development must, he said, be self-funding.

It could include a 'market area' or other retail businesses, though Harpenden Society member John Davis expressed the view that demand for more shop premises appeared to now be in decline. There was a further suggestion that the Library could be relocated to the site.

There was general agreement by all concerned that, because of the site's prominent location, especially as viewed

across Harpenden Common when approaching the town, the planned development should be visually attractive – more attractive than today's Public Halls, something which was arguably not too difficult. Accordingly, all four of the tentative building configurations put forward for comment at the consultation evening included (as with the existing Public Halls) a generous open area, described as a potential 'activity space' or 'meeting place', fronting on to the Common.

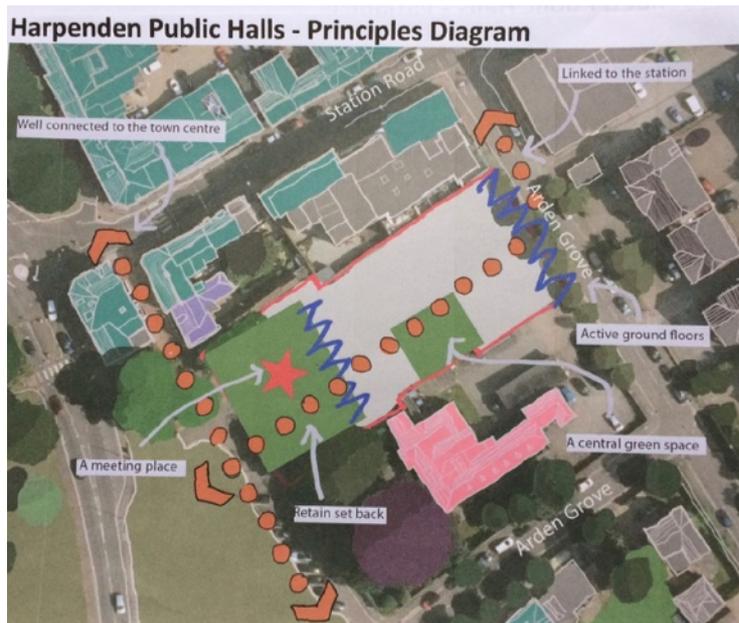
At the same time it was felt important that the appearance ought also to be visually pleasing from the Arden Grove side. That should not be thought of as the 'back' or 'rear' of the

development, which was how that end of the site was currently regarded. Another common feature of all four outline designs is a 'central green space' or courtyard/garden area, on the south side (facing on to Harpenden Hall) of what is essentially, in each case, a C-shaped building. That area could be 'semi private' for the use primarily of apartment residents.

Critical to the planners, and therefore central to group discussions at the consultation evening, were questions relating to the size of the building, that is its ground space area on the site, the consequent total floorspace as well as the particularly sensitive issue of its height, namely how many storeys.

It was recognised that the development should, as far as possible harmonise with, but without visually dominating, historic Harpenden Hall on one side or, on the other side, facing the Common, the listed 16th Century timber-framed house at number 2 Southdown Road. However, at its Arden Grove end, the site is itself dominated by the overwhelming height of the immediately adjacent former Post Office building.

That has been taken as 'architectural justification' for the proposed development to be four storeys high at the Arden Grove end, roughly matching the ex-PO building in height. There is even suggestion of a roof garden on the future apartment block to 'accompany' the existing one 'next door'.



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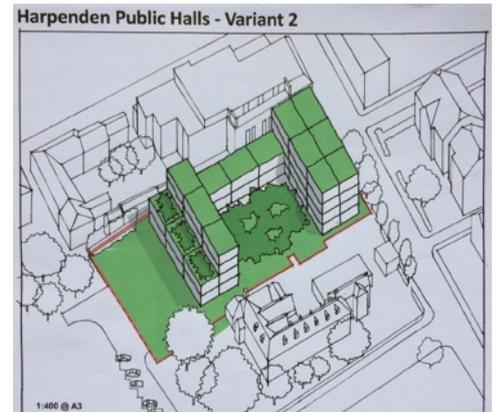
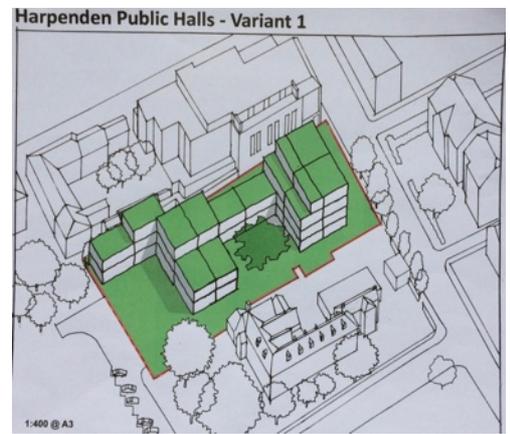
On the assumption that SADC's planning approval is obtained for one or more four-storey sections, three or four different configurations were put forward for comment at the consultation evening, in the form of simple isometric (three-dimensional) block drawings (right). All were based on the building having just two storeys at the Common end, 'stepping up' to three and then four floors towards the Arden Grove end.

While maintaining those 'stepped level' parameters, the building's floorspace could be maximised – in the interests of SADC rental income – at 12,400sq ft, comprising 8980sq ft of residential accommodation and 3400sq ft of ground floor 'community space'. But, from an aesthetic townscape standpoint, less concentrated use of the available site area and of potential indoor space was obviously preferable.

Accordingly, three alternative layouts were proposed for realistic adoption, offering between 8370 and 12,380sq ft of overall floorspace, between 4100 and 8700sq ft allocated for apartments, and a ground floor of between 2300 and 3970sq ft.

Whichever option was chosen it was said that the stepped roofline would be visually 'softened' through the use of gables with green colouring predominant. A 60-space underground car park is projected, though flooding issues with the Public Halls' existing effectively unused basement area might pose construction challenges.

What of the next steps in the proposal? SADC project manager Barry Cronin said Harpenden residents' comments at the consultation evening would bring the outline design a stage closer, to the point where architects could be briefed and negotiations with planners could get under way. **THS**



# Support the Neighbourhood Plan!

## Society Chairman Phil Waters writes:

'All society members, as well as everyone else in the town, should have received polling cards for the Harpenden Neighbourhood Plan referendum being held on Thursday February 7. No, it's not a second Brexit referendum! But it's still important for all of us locally.

'This referendum is solely about whether or not the Neighbourhood Plan – copies of which were delivered to every household last year and to which there were some 3600 responses – should be formally adopted. The Plan, which remains available for scrutiny on the Town Council website, sets out a range of planning policies designed to protect the character and well-being of Harpenden for the next fifteen years. It will, if adopted, have to be considered whenever a proposal for new housing or other development comes before the ultimate planning authority, viz St Albans District Council.

'It also provides a framework around which developers would be obliged to provide funding for community benefit as part of any approved development. The Harpenden Society supports the adoption of the Plan and urges members and the town's wider electorate to vote YES to the Plan being adopted.

Want to know more about the Plan's provisions? Then go to <https://youtu.be/DB4fx449ouY>, a Society video setting out the case for the Plan. And most importantly, make a note on your calendar to cast your referendum vote on February 7'. **THS**



# Rothamsted's rejected housing plan 'won't lie down'

Just eight supposedly definitive sites for future major housing development – two in Harpenden – were nominated last year by St Albans District Council in its updated Local Plan. A clear rejection of the many other site 'offerings' in the district was implied. But the landowner of at least one of those sites is refusing to take that repudiation lying down.

Lawes Agricultural Trust (LAT), which defines itself as a charity that can trace its origins to a trust established in 1889 by the founders of Harpenden's Rothamsted Experimental Station (today's Rothamsted Research), is pushing on vigorously with its proposal for up to 1000 homes to be built on Rothamsted land north east of Redbourn.

Harpenden residents were given the opportunity to scrutinise the outline plans at an exhibition in early November at Rothamsted's Fowden Hall. If nothing else it drew attention to the often unrealised extent of Rothamsted's land holdings to the west of Harpenden town boundaries.



The 116-acre site comprises a tract of land between the Redbourn by-pass and the old A5 Watling Street to the west. Just over half the site, some 60 acres, would be assigned for housing. It is envisaged that the remainder would become a public wetland countryside park, alongside the River Ver. The whole of the site has been used by Rothamsted for crop trials for many years, but is now said by LAT to be effectively surplus to requirements, largely because agricultural research in the 21st Century is ever more concentrated on indoor laboratory-centred technology.

Clearly the value of the land, if approved by SADC for housing, is substantial, with LAT the prime financial beneficiary. However, it claims that the money it would receive from the sale of the land is badly needed to fund Rothamsted's research programmes, to compensate for the large cut-backs in government funding from which it continues to suffer.

Rothamsted Research is a major employer in the area, with a payroll of around 500, and it points out that recruitment of new staff – often highly qualified – is held back by the prohibitive cost of housing in the area. Its development proposals on the edge of Redbourn accordingly include around 40% of 'affordable' housing, some of which would provide long-term accommodation for RR staff people. The intention is that about 70% of that 40% should be available for renting rather than buying, 'with priority given to local people'.

In a formal statement LAT says 'We want to be part of a sustainable future that keeps the area attractive to young people seeking high quality jobs and to local people who want to strengthen their community close to home'.

Also included in the planned mix of properties on the site are what are described as 'small retirement bungalows', as well as 'plots for build-it-yourself properties'. The tentative layout of the development shows it divided into distinct self-contained neighbourhoods, though in close proximity to a new 'village green at the top of the (Redbourn) high street'. It is claimed that the high street will be 'rejuvenated', helping its shops 'to not only survive but thrive', boosted crucially by the provision of 70 car park spaces close to the high street.

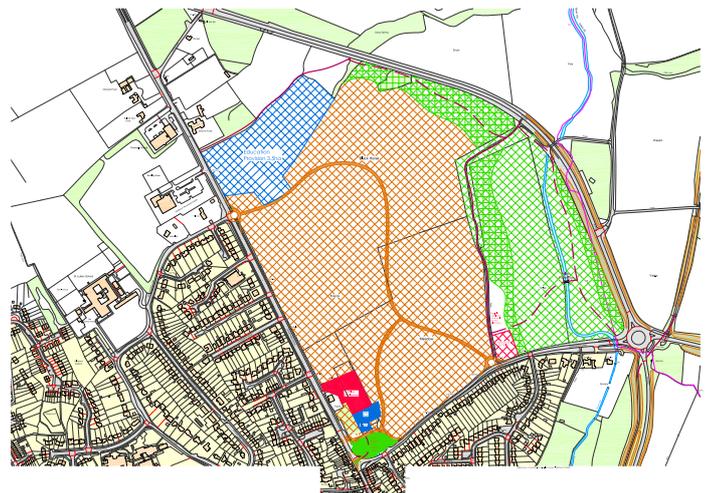
In addition to residential housing on the site, the LAT proposals include a new primary school and a community health centre to serve an expanded Redbourn population. The possibility of a small office and business centre is also put forward for consideration, as well as a new fire station to replace the existing dated facility on the corner of Harpenden Lane and the former A5 Dunstable Road.

Other details in the ambitious initial LAT plan include a direct link for walkers and cyclists between the new housing area and the Nickey Line footpath, with a pedestrian/cycle bridge spanning the Redbourn By-Pass and Redbourn Lane at their intersecting roundabout, as well as additional pedestrian crossings on Harpenden Lane and Dunstable Road, to cope with inevitably increased traffic volumes.

A so-called 'masterplan' for the scheme was being prepared at the turn of the year, with a view to its finalisation, says LAT, by 'Spring 2019'. The need to move fast is surely evident from the assertion made by SADC planning portfolio holder Cllr Mary Maynard at the Harpenden Society's October public meeting (see our Autumn newsletter) that the definitive Local Plan must be approved to the satisfaction of the Secretary of State by March of this year. Any reversal of the earlier LAT site's rejection by SADC surely implies a further time-consuming LP redraft.

A question left hanging in the air is whether a go-ahead for 1000 homes to be built on the LAT site north-east of Redbourn would reduce the 'quota' required to be built elsewhere in the district, to meet SADC's Local Plan housing commitment for the 2020-2036 period. In view of the site's relative proximity to Harpenden, taking into account traffic generation issues especially, it would surely be logical in the necessary LP redraft for the council planners to review the requirement to build on the town's two currently designated sites. **THS**

General Layout and site Plan - FOR ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES ONLY



# Hoping for easier parking? – don't hold your breath!

**'Only a miracle worker can solve Harpenden's parking problems'.** That was the view expressed by one of the hundred or so residents who attended the public meeting in mid-January convened by The Harpenden Society to address the many ramifications of the town's car parking issues. There were murmurs of agreement throughout the High Sreet Methodist Church hall.

Much of the meeting, chaired by Society chairman Phil Waters, was spent on identifying the problems, which as everyone agreed were getting progressively worse. John Talbot, representing HarPark, the group formed about four years ago, initially to address parking issues in The Avenues area of the town, put the issues into context. He said a 2014 report declared that 'Harpenden may be characterised as an extremely busy highway running through a dense and heaving car park'. Five years on and there had, by common consent, been no easing of the pressure. Quite the contrary – the volume of traffic and the commensurate demand for parking spaces had grown exponentially.

It was pointed out by many of those at the meeting that there were parking challenges beyond the more obvious town centre and railway station locations. A holistic approach was needed. For example, planning approval for major as well as smaller housing developments, especially apartment blocks, often took little account of occupants' car ownership and the corresponding requirement for off-road parking. Two or more cars per household was now the norm.

A case in point was the projected development on the Pan Autos site at Southdown, where 39 flats are proposed, with just 44 parking spaces. When similar plans had been submitted in recent years and approval refused on the grounds of insufficient parking, that rejection had regrettably been overturned on appeal.



*John Talbot  
HarPark Chair*

St Albans District Councillor Teresa Heritage, sharing the platform with John Talbot, said it was easy to say that 'people have more cars than they need' and that a change of culture, getting motorists to use public transport, was needed. But it was an unrealistic expectation, at least in the short term.

In any case, she conceded that SADC was 'too busy' with such matters as smoothing traffic flow through the town to devote serious attention to the question of parking. She added that Hertfordshire County Council, though nominally responsible for highways, had no budget allocation for car parking specifically. Meanwhile Harpenden Town Council's attitude seemed to be one of 'it's not our problem mate',

evident in the Neighbourhood Plan seeming to ignore the issue.

Councillor Heritage supported HarPark's call for a Harpenden-centred professional survey by consultants experienced in the field of urban planning focussed on parking issues. But it was conceded that such a survey would inevitably be costly and there was currently no public finance available.



*Councillor  
Teresa Heritage*

Among the numerous points raised during the meeting and which would necessarily come under scrutiny could a feasibility survey be commissioned, was the traffic disruption and parking hindrance frequently caused in the main shopping area of the town by large delivery vehicles. Similar disturbance was caused by commercial vehicles delivering building materials and construction plant to development sites.

Often parked on single or even double yellow lines, with their nearside wheels on the pavement, they had unspoken immunity from police or traffic warden attention. The implicit suggestion was that High Street and Station Road shop deliveries should be restricted to specified times to create minimum disruption.

A questionnaire carried out last year by HarPark achieved a near 20% response from the 1000 papers circulated. It revealed that, of the ten categories of respondent, Harpenden residents who shopped in the town were by far the most vocal, many declaring they experienced parking problems 'every day'. Retailers themselves reported corresponding difficulties, as did their employees, many of whom drove into Harpenden each day from outside the area.



*The Station car park, full by 7.30am virtually every day*

**Continues on next page**

For such retail shop workers, paid-for parking was unsustainable. One said ‘a day’s parking can cost me an hour’s pay’. Commuters were more vociferous about the car parks at Harpenden Station being often full by 7.30am and even Bowers Way car park by 8.00am. Their high cost, of as much as £10.90 a day was the ironical penalty of finding a space. A commuter living at Kimpton contrasted the high cost of parking at Harpenden with that at Welwyn Garden City station, where he paid less than half.

A quite different grouse raised at the meeting was the widespread habit in residential streets of parking with two wheels on the pavement – something which was unavoidable in some instances, typically where cars were parked on both sides, leaving just a one-way ‘lane’ between them. Cllr Heritage said although such parking was technically unlawful, enforcement was in practice unlikely, unless the footway was obstructed to the extent of hindering wheelchair or push-chair passage.

On the all-important question of providing more car parking, there were, perhaps inevitably, suggestions from the floor that double-decking one or more of the town’s car parks was an obvious solution. Tentative plans to double-deck that in Amenbury Lane, to accompany the leisure centre redevelopment, had been dismissed because of nearby residents’ objections.

The east station car park was another obvious candidate for double-decking but it brought funding complications involving Network Rail, added to which were objections from flat-dwellers in Milton Road. That left Bowers Way as ‘the least unlikely’ location for a two-level car park development. But it was clear from what was said at the meeting that formidable funding obstacles remained.

Among the more ambitious suggestions that emerged from the meeting was that of opening a new railway station to the

north of the town, perhaps at East Hyde, where land could be made available for a large car park and from where Harpenden commuters could travel into London. It might perhaps double as a park-and-ride hub, served by a future extension of the Hopper minibus service which is due to resume, using two brand new 16-seat vehicles, in April.

The January meeting served, at least, to air the many issues surrounding the vexed question of parking in Harpenden. However, many attendees came away without much confidence that meaningful progress was likely in the foreseeable future, most obviously because of the problems of funding at every turn.



*One of the many slides showing the analysis of questionnaires from over 200 respondents.*

*Pavement parking remains a problem - below*



THS

## Wanted: volunteers to ‘play postman’

This newsletter is likely to have been delivered through your letterbox by one of the Harpenden Society’s dedicated army of deliverers who, over the years, have become as familiar with the challenges of the job as their daily Post Office counterparts. Dealing with today’s often fierce letterbox closure springs and accompanying resistant internal bristles makes the postal delivery worker’s task arguably comparable with that apocryphal savage dog on the other side of the door.

Notwithstanding that genially cautionary preamble, most of our newsletter distributors find their quarterly neighbourhood perambulations far from onerous. They are happy to do it, on which basis we are seeking new recruits to the delivery team, mainly to replace volunteers who have moved away or have decided it’s time to hang up their delivery boots.



If you feel you would like to help in the vital task of keeping our 900-plus Harpenden Society members – particularly those unable to get to our regular meetings – abreast of society activities and events, through the pages of the newsletter, please let us know, with an email to [secretary@harpendensociety.org](mailto:secretary@harpendensociety.org). Or phone the editor Alan Bunting on 01582 760564. **THS**

# Five years of volunteering keep library's Wednesday opening

Wednesday was for many decades 'early closing' day for shops in Harpenden and in many other towns in the country. And because many shoppers chose, on the same trip into town, to fit in a visit to the library, it was quite logical for a similar 'early closing' regime to be applied.

But into the 21st Century, fiercer retailer competition and broader customer expectations saw shop opening hours extended, supermarkets typically trading well into the evening, with the concept of an 'early closing' day each week being largely consigned to history. It meant that there were as many shoppers likely to want to visit the library on Wednesday afternoons as on any other weekday.

Accordingly, towards the end of 2013, emerging from discussions between the Harpenden Society and the town's Library Service, a volunteer scheme was proposed enabling the library's Wednesday opening hours to be extended beyond 1.00pm. It was duly approved and the Harpenden Society undertook to provide volunteer staffing to keep the library open through to 7.00pm.

A number of willing volunteers came forward and after initial training the first day of extended opening was set for Wednesday 22nd January 2014. Such has been their dedication and enthusiasm that since that notable day it has been possible for the library to remain open until 7.00pm every Wednesday. In an era when too many seemingly bright ideas prove to be short lived, its fifth anniversary in January 2019 is surely worthy of quiet celebration.



Above from left to right: *Liz Trounce (organiser), Pauline Porter, Theresa Malcolm, Bob Gunning, Jane Gilbert, Jerry Harrold, Lucy Broomfield, Anne Macdougall, Lynn Payne, Sue French, Peter Spriggs, Anna Bannard, Jill Spriggs.*

For the statistically minded, allowing for the odd closed Wednesday, depending on when Christmas and New Year falls each year, our team of 21 volunteers have between them worked about 3000 hours during that time, providing 1500 extra library opening hours. That is approximately 250 Wednesdays, with four volunteers working in two shifts each week.

It is difficult to estimate how many people have been able to make use of the library during those hours. But the numbers are significant and there has been sufficient feedback from library users on Wednesday afternoons through to 7 o'clock to show how much the extended opening hours are appreciated. The regular library staff and management have been very supportive and the Wednesday volunteer input has undoubtedly contributed to making Harpenden library the busiest for its size in Hertfordshire.

The Wednesday volunteer library service does admittedly have some limitations. It is confined to the 'express' service in the front part of the library, and volunteers are not able to provide as many services as the professional library staff. However, recently a helpline has been established which the volunteers can use to widen the scope of the help given to users and many more queries can be answered. It is a matter of pride that the Harpenden Society-backed volunteer scheme has worked so well for five years, reinforced by the feedback from contented Harpenden library users. **THS**

# AWARDS 2018

We need your help in identifying the best of the new in Harpenden so that we can recognise what is worthy of an award. Please let us know of any new building developments or facilities completed in 2018 that you believe are worthy of our recognition. The premier award is a Plaque for outstanding projects. Other projects may be given a Certificate of Merit or a Letter of Commendation.

We did not award a Plaque winner for 2017 however The Certificate of Merit was awarded to Rothamsted Research and Lawes Agricultural Trust for De Ramsey Court and Fisher Court.



Please complete either or both these sections below by **March 31st 2019**:

I wish to nominate the following for the 2018 Harpenden Society Plaque:

.....  
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I wish to nominate the following for a 2018 Harpenden Society Certificate of Merit or Letter of Commendation

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Please use this space for any comments

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Please email to 'awards@harpendsociety.org' or post to: Penny Ayres, Kinsbourne House, Kinsbourne Green, Harpenden AL5 3PE.

OR Go to the Society web site:  
[www.harpendsociety.org](http://www.harpendsociety.org)

Our Awards Committee will visit and examine all nominations and select the winners. These will be announced at the AGM and in the Newsletter.

# Did You Know? From Harpenden's history From Radio Doctor to broadcasting supremo

Among Harpenden's illustrious former residents, alongside 'Cat's Eyes' Cunningham and Eric Morecambe, but who made his mark in a very different sphere, is Charles Hill, remembered by many of a certain age as the BBC's 'Radio Doctor' during the Second World War. In the 1940s he came to live, for over 25 years, at 'Brooklands', no 26 Milton Road, a rambling Victorian house demolished in the late 60s to make way for the flats of Linden Court and Heathview. By that time, as Lord Hill of Luton, he and his wife moved to a more modern and smaller house at no 3 Bamville Wood.

Their last move was to an apartment at 'Borodale', the large house in Kirkwick Avenue, which for a number of years – perhaps appropriately – housed a group doctors' practice. There he spent his final years. He died in 1989, aged 85.



*Lord Hill when  
chairman of the  
BBC*

His role as the Radio Doctor was, so to speak, an anonymous one. Because the BBC, under its director-general John (later Lord) Reith, forbade any form of advertising over the airwaves, Hill was identified only by what many thought of as his unmistakable voice. His lugubrious tones, especially when referring to such matters as 'a grumbling appendix', fitted well with the down-to-earth medical advice he offered his listeners, every morning at breakfast time.

He didn't mince his words, recommending his wartime audience for example 'to eat something raw every day' if they wanted to stay healthy. In addressing the potentially embarrassing issue of constipation, he advocated a diet including 'those black-coated workers', viz prunes. In 1943 fifteen of his broadcast talks were distilled into a small book entitled 'Wise Eating in Wartime', published by the Ministry of Information, price 4d.

He always used everyday language. In a written answer to a listener's question about chilblains, Dr Hill wrote 'if you take a whopping great chilblain to a doctor he can't plonk something on it or give you something to swallow which will certainly cure it'.

From 1932, Hill had worked for the British Medical Association, rising to become its secretary and later chairman. In 1947/48 when the Attlee government was formulating its plans to launch the National Health Service,

Hill was in the forefront of those many doctors in opposition. Their objections centred on the perception that, in the proposed NHS, doctors would effectively become civil servants, in Hill's words 'under the cold hand of bureaucratic control'.

His prime adversary in the argument was the Welsh firebrand health minister Aneurin Bevan, often regarded as the 'father of the NHS' and well on the left of the Labour Party. Hill's daughter and Harpenden Society member Susan Fairbairn, who moved away and then returned, maintains that her father, an unapologetic Conservative all his life, nevertheless respected Bevan.

In 1948 Hill was a prime motivator in the creation of the Harpenden Trust. Along with local benefactors such as Councillor Ernie Ackroyd he recognised that although Harpenden was superficially a prosperous village there were pockets of poverty and hardship which the new charity could help to alleviate.

At the 1950 general election Hill stood as Conservative candidate for the Luton constituency and won the seat. The following year prime minister Winston Churchill appointed him parliamentary secretary to the Ministry of Food – a job for which he was clearly well qualified. A less obvious Hill appointment was that of Postmaster General in 1955, where his brief included broadcasting, which led to him heavily criticising the BBC for what he saw as its anti-government coverage of the 1956 Suez crisis.

He subsequently held several ministerial posts until, in 1962, he was ousted in Harold Macmillan's infamous 'Night of the Long Knives'. Possibly because of his 'anti BBC' views, in 1963 Hill was appointed chairman of the Independent Television Authority, overseeing commercial broadcasting. The same year he was created 'Baron Hill of Luton'.

Controversially in 1967, under Harold Wilson's Labour administration, to the general disgust of the corporation's governors, several of whom resigned, Lord Hill was made chairman of the BBC. His immediate predecessor said it was 'like inviting Rommel to command the Eighth Army at Alamein'.



*After retiring  
Lord Hill lived  
here at  
no 3 Bamville  
Wood.*

He is said to have had a difficult relationship with the BBC's director-general Hugh Carleton Greene, who had encouraged innovative and socially-controversial programmes such as That Was the Week that Was and the Wednesday Play, which Hill regarded as straying too far away from traditional 'Reithian' values. Greene was accordingly forced to resign in 1968.

Lord Hill remained chairman of the BBC governors until his retirement in 1972 at the age of 68, around the time of his 'downsizing' house move from Milton Road to Bamville Wood.

**Acknowledgement: Harpenden Local History Society**

**THS**

# EDITOR'S VIEW Alan Bunting

## Health centre lack-of-progress frustration



The National Health Service celebrated its 70th anniversary last year. Its creation, in 1948, was controversial – see 'Did you know?' article about Lord Hill of Luton on page 7. Seven decades later anything to do with the NHS, in particular its funding, remains contentious. Hopes of a brand new hospital to serve our area, tentatively sited between St Albans and Hemel Hempstead, which would replace the dated and sprawling facilities at their two existing hospitals, have long since faded.

Instead, the slightly more positive expectation is that Watford General Hospital will be expanded to cope with increasing demand from a growing West Hertfordshire population. Concerns about the physical problems of distance and traffic in getting to Watford, most notably from Harpenden via the M1, are by implication dismissed.

But funding for any new hospital or medical facilities looms large as the key obstacle. Any decisions on NHS investment are repeatedly, to borrow the cliché, 'kicked into the long grass'. Nowhere is that more apparent than in the plans for Harpenden's new 'Health and Wellbeing Centre' on the Red House site in Carlton Road. In our Winter 2017 newsletter we reported that a target date for completion of the project had been set at April 2019. **But here we are only three months away from that date and progress can, at least to outward appearances, be summed up as appearing to have stalled.**

This is more than surprising given the official statement announced on April 19 2018 at the Society Public meeting in front of an audience of some 150 of the town's residents who were told that construction work would now begin during 2019, with the new centre being 'ready for use' in late 2020.

On the crucial issue of funding, Diane Brent, the Trust's assistant director of facilities said the plans for the site, which amounted to a major upgrade of and extension to 'The Stewarts' current health facility, involved an up-front investment of between £3m and £4m. However, said Ms Brent, the adjacent housing planned on the Red House site, made the creation of the new centre effectively 'self funding'.

**So, what's the hold-up?** The Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust (HCT), which put on the impressive and detailed display of its proposals in October 2017, has a Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), a key decision-making body on any new project like that for the Red House site. In turn the CCG has a finance committee whose role is an obvious one, of weighing up the funding issues. A change in policy last year around how the CCG commissions and delivers services has seemingly impeded the timetable.

It transpires that the 'business case' for the plan was re-examined last September, when doubts were raised, in particular about risks related to the likely utilisation of the

facility, both initially and ongoing. We are told that an updated business case is due to go before the aforementioned CCG finance committee 'in February'. Even given a go-ahead then, the planning approval procedure has to be gone through, involving inevitably more delays.

Meanwhile, among potential beneficiaries of the promised and much anticipated Health and Wellbeing Centre, especially patients in Harpenden who have to travel considerable distances to clinics or hospitals outside the town, for their or their children's routine medical services, there are feelings of frustration and even anger that the new facility looks no nearer than when it was first mooted some three years ago. **THS**

### SOCIETY PUBLIC MEETING DATES

14th February 2019

7.30 pm for 8.00pm

Rothamsted Conference Centre

Bim Afolami MP



Check our web site to book your

FREE tickets

[www.harpendensociety.org](http://www.harpendensociety.org)

Please send comments on any of the articles or issues raised

in this edition to the editor: Alan Bunting  
[editor@harpendensociety.org](mailto:editor@harpendensociety.org).

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Visit the Society's website –

[www.harpendensociety.org](http://www.harpendensociety.org)

Designed by Ron Taylor

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