



## SADC asks 'are our Town and Rural Councils doing a good job?'

'How local communities (in and around St Albans) are governed' is an issue which, on the face of it, ought to be of concern to everyone in Harpenden. And it is one on which we are all being invited to pronounce judgment, in a consultation launched by the District Council (SADC).

But the terms of the opinion-seeking initiative are being regarded by many as unnecessarily vague and therefore of questionable value, particularly given the acknowledged existing strains on SADC's finances and the further manifold claims on its resources. Those relate significantly to the formulation of an entirely new **Local Plan** (see the front page of our Autumn newsletter) which, it is now evident, is unlikely to be finalised and approved by central government before Autumn 2025, two years behind schedule.

As part of a wide-sweeping SADC review of 'governance arrangements at parish and town council level', the consultation is being interpreted in some quarters as part of a 'defence mechanism' against the threat – made last year by the County Council – of the possible abolition of district councils through the creation of an amorphous (arguably faceless) Hertfordshire 'unitary authority'.

The review and consultation involve the district's eight parish councils, **Harpenden Town Council** and an 'unparished area' within St Albans city. Its declared and somewhat nebulous aim is 'to see if improvements are needed so that those councils better reflect local identities and serve communities more effectively'.

Rather more specifically it will address the possible need to alter the number of SADC wards and councillors – or even to create an additional parish or town council. Existing boundaries between council areas will also be reviewed, with the geographical relationship between Harpenden Town Council and Harpenden Rural Parish Council a possible matter of scrutiny.

Chris White, Liberal Democrat leader of SADC, points out that the responsibilities of parish and town councils within St Albans district include the management of parks, open spaces and allotments. Through local initiatives, exemplified by Harpenden's Neighbourhood Plan, they can also influence important decisions taken by other authorities.

It might be thought that Mr White and the council he leads had plenty on their plate, what with Local Plan and

parish/town council governance issues, without getting involved in projects centred outside the district. But it hasn't stopped SADC becoming a 'partner' of Dacorum Borough Council in the creation of **Hemel Garden Communities (HGC)**, described as 'an ambitious development programme that will transform Hemel Hempstead and create attractive and sustainable new neighbourhoods and communities to the north and east of Hemel Hempstead, through the delivery of more than 11,000 new homes and 10,000 new jobs by 2050'.



*Residents' opinions sought on Town Council performance*

All those homes and nearly all those jobs would be on Dacorum 'territory', many of the latter in what is being designated as the Hertfordshire Innovation Quarter, 'a new business park' which, in reality, comprises eight different commercial/industrial sites. They are all close to Hemel Hempstead with the notable exception of Harpenden's Rothamsted Research which has been eager to attract tenants for its vacant refurbished office accommodation, notably in the historic and prominent Russell Building.

Residents, community groups and other organisations can give their views on the SADC local governance consultation online at [elections@stalbans.gov.uk](mailto:elections@stalbans.gov.uk) or by post to Electoral Services (CGR), St Albans City and District Council, Civic Centre, St Peter's Street, St Albans, AL1 3JE.

**The consultation will run until Thursday 31 March.**

**Wordsmith required see page 12**

## Kingston House set to make a 'comeback'

For about 60 years, from 1912 until the early 1970s, **Kingston House** was a name to conjure with in Harpenden's High Street shopping centre. It was the town's – and formerly the village's – own department store, prominently located next to The George and the 'go to' retailer for a wide range of hardware and other household merchandise.



Nearly 50 years on, the same premises are set to regain their former name. The Oakman Group restaurant chain plans to open a revived **Kingston House** as what it calls a 'modern public house', embodying a restaurant on three levels with a maximum of 225 covers. The plans for which show seating on all floors while offering a range of food and drink which it is claimed will suit all tastes and pockets.

### Proposed plan for Ground Floor



### Proposed plan for the Terrace



Oakman's proposal is to extend the second floor of the building rearwards (adjacent to Leyton Road), adding what the company describes as a 'lightweight pergola with retractable fabric awning and glazed screen sides' on to what would be a structurally-altered existing section of flat roof. A 49-seat roof-top terrace would be created, complete with a 'service bar'. It would cater for alfresco dining with the awning fully open and all-year-round use when closed. Two 'dumb waiter' hoists would enable food and drinks to be lifted from the ground floor kitchen/bar areas.

An extensive transformation of the existing retail premises (most recently occupied by M&Co) is planned. However, its prime location in the town centre conservation area means that the outward appearance, as viewed from the south side as well as the front would have to be largely maintained.

Founded in 2007, the Oakman Group already operates 30 pub/restaurants across the home counties, most of them accommodated in older landmark buildings, with the Harpenden project conforming to the established pattern.

It was made clear at an on-site public presentation of the **Kingston House** proposals in early December that an immense amount of interior and exterior building work would be involved. And that cannot get underway until planning approval – in a sensitive conservation area – is obtained from SADC. A member of the Oakman team indicated that, if and when its plans were approved, the conversion of the building, before it was ready to receive its first customers, would take an estimated 30 weeks, with the expectation of a grand opening before Christmas 2022.

*Oakman Inns chief executive Dermot King, writing in the 'i' newspaper, referring to the effect of Covid restrictions on hotel and restaurant services, made a plea for the government to 'commit to a 5% permanent reduction in VAT...so that restaurants can compete with supermarkets, which charge only 5% on luxury food items'.*

# Red House update comes under Zoom scrutiny

In our Autumn newsletter we reported on the extensive refurbishment of Harpenden Memorial Hospital undertaken during the Spring and Summer of 2021 to largely fulfil the plans announced back in 2018 to turn the 'Red House' into an 'all singing' **Health and Wellbeing Centre**. Though the update of the buildings and its medical facilities – financed from NHS resources, without the need to sell off part of the site for housing – were welcomed by patient groups and the people of Harpenden generally, widespread feelings had been expressed that the modernisation fell short of expectations, especially in the light of the Herts Valley Clinical Commissioning Group's presentation two years ago, at the public meeting we reported on the front page of our Autumn 2019 issue.

Some of the concerns were addressed at a Zoom meeting in mid-November, to which all interested parties were invited by the Central London Community Healthcare Trust (CLCH) – the NHS body which, in early 2019 – to the disquiet of many local people – took over responsibility from the former Hertfordshire Community Trust.

Cathy Walker, CLCH divisional director, began by acknowledging the importance of the Red House, being 'much loved' by the people of Harpenden, while stressing that a lot of work had been necessary on the fabric, especially the 1950s single-storey flat-roofed Halley Stewart building. Other essential work included re-wiring, installation of air-conditioning and an updated fire alarm system.

**Harpenden Memorial Hospital Development Phase 2**

**Development of Outpatients**

- Upgraded & increased number of clinic rooms in Red House & Halley Stewart Building from 4 to 10
  - Red House - Podiatry, Heart Failure, Bladder & Bowel, Parkinson's Disease, Speech & Language, Frailty, Diabetes, Retinal screening, Acupuncture
  - Halley Stewart - ENT, Phlebotomy
- Upgraded Friends Room to support clinical group activities
  - Cardiac Rehabilitation, Pulmonary Rehabilitation, Alcoholics Anonymous

The slide also features three photographs showing modernized clinic interiors and the NHS Central London Community Healthcare logo.

It was explained that some cardiac treatment, pulmonary rehabilitation and an Alcoholics Anonymous service were now being provided. A district nursing and therapist care home team were newly based on the site, and a CLCH administration base had been relocated to the (120 year old) Red House building.

The most recent innovations (categorised as 'phase 3') involved the Hertfordshire Neurological Rehabilitation unit being moved from its former location in Watford to the one-time maternity hospital buildings adjoining the rear of the Red House, together with the opening of new clinic rooms and a gymnasium.

The next phase of the improvement programme would involve window replacement, further remedial work on the roof of the old building, a tidier car park layout and a sprucing up of the neglected green spaces adjacent to Stewart Road.

In the ensuing Q&A Zoom session Harpenden Society member Alan Falconer said it was regrettable that what were relatively routine ophthalmology services were not being provided at the updated Red House site, bearing in mind the necessarily older age groups of needy patients and the travel challenges of their getting to main hospitals.



A question about audiology services led to the meeting hosts pointing out that patients can now obtain hearing aid batteries through the post when ordered by telephone from St Albans City Hospital.

A suggestion was also made that the Red House site would be an ideal location for a more comprehensive ENT and dermatology unit under the NHS's widely-promoted Communitas Clinics scheme. Another Zoom questioner wondered why post-cardiac rehabilitation was not being catered for.

In response to those comments and questions Glenda Esmond said that the provision of new services had been unavoidably delayed by Covid restrictions but a potential expansion of the range of services was due to be reviewed.

Answering a further question about possible provision of X-ray, MRI and ultrasound procedures, she explained that, in the way that NHS services were structured, they were not within the CLCH's remit.

Though the number of treatment rooms on site had been increased from four to ten (eight in the Red House building and two in Halley Stewart), another questioner asked how many of them were in active use? It was conceded that they could not yet all be fully used, partly because of the well-publicised – nationwide – shortage of nursing staff; she said there was currently a 13% vacancy rate locally. She added that temporarily, under Covid emergency conditions, some of the treatment rooms have had to be pressed into use for storing PPE (personal protective equipment) and for high-tech vaccine refrigeration units.

## Leisure Centre wins Society Merit Award

The Harpenden Society 'Certificate of Merit' Award for noteworthy local developments completed in the year 2020 was presented in December to St Albans District Council for the Harpenden Leisure Centre in Rothamsted Park, for its role in greatly increasing the range and extent of sports facilities available to people in the town. Anthony Rowlands, SADC's lead councillor for the public realm received the Award from Society chairman Phil Waters. Seen, front row, left to right, are: Peter Simpson, director of Space & Place, the architects responsible for the Leisure Centre design; Cllr Robert Donald, SADC commercial and development portfolio holder; Cllr Rowlands; Phil Waters; Society Awards secretary Penny Ayres; and Tony Marmo, SADC's head commercial & development officer.



## Local Plan 'restart' revives Lawes Trust housing scheme

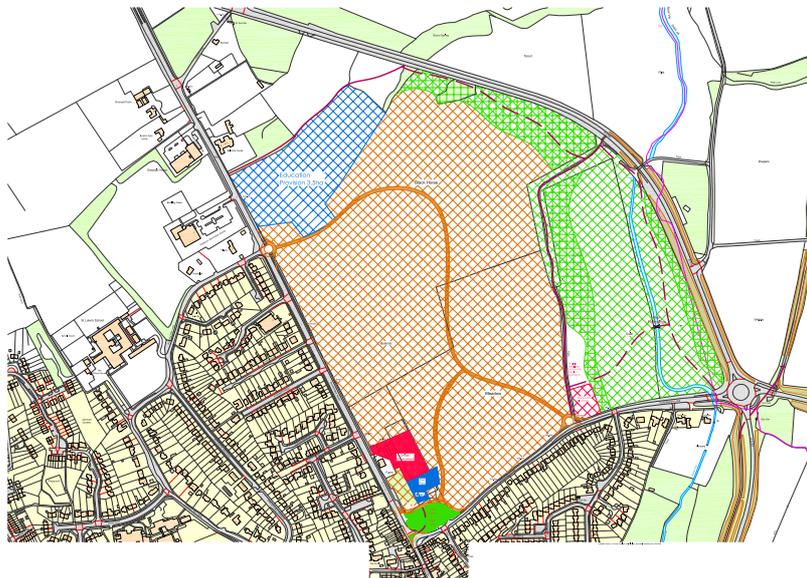
Government inspectors' demand that St Albans District Council should compile a new **Local Plan** 'from scratch', as outlined by Cllr Jamie Day at a Harpenden Society meeting last September (and reported in our Autumn newsletter), will involve a fresh call for housing development sites. Accordingly, Rothamsted Research parent Lawes Agricultural Trust (LAT) is to resubmit its proposals, put forward in 2018, but disregarded in the former SADC administration's draft **LP**, for up to 1000 homes to be built on over 100 acres of mainly arable land it owns on the north side of Redbourn.

LAT has entered into an agreement with a London-based development company Lands Improvement Holdings, whose aim is to 'work with SADC, stakeholders, residents and businesses to release the site from the Green Belt', within the remit of the yet-to-be-formulated new **LP**.

The LAT/LIH proposals for the site, on the western fringes of Rothamsted Research land, are largely as we reported them in our Winter 2018/19 newsletter, incorporating a landscaped 'country park along the River Ver, coupled with infrastructure improvements for wider social and community needs'. Peter Oxley, LAT executive director, says funding from the sale of the land for housing 'is vital for the long-term support

for important scientific research activities at Rothamsted...meeting the global challenges of feeding a growing population in a more sustainable manner'.

But Cllr David Mitchell, chairman of Redbourn Parish Council, says it will 'resist extensive development on the Green Belt in Redbourn, though recognising the need for some genuinely affordable housing locally'. He adds that 'a thousand new houses is too many and would change the rural nature of Redbourn village for ever', while pointing out that the LAT parcel of land is one of several previously identified locally in the call-for-sites process.



Land to the west of Redbourn on either side of SADC's boundary with Dacorum (Hemel Hempstead) is likely to come under scrutiny for housing within the terms of the co-operation now demanded between adjacent planning authorities – an issue which contributed to the rejection of earlier SADC **Local Plan drafts**. Cllr Mitchell says 'Redbourn parish as a whole could end up with over 7000 new

houses on its Green Belt, destroying huge swathes of our surrounding countryside'.

*Some Harpenden residents are thought likely to support the LAT's Redbourn proposals because of the implication that, if approved – and given SADC's requirement to fulfil central government's new homes 'quota' in the district – it would relieve pressure to build on Harpenden Green Belt land, on the north side of the town especially.*

## New Conservation Area initiative

It can be fairly claimed that one of the Harpenden Society's key roles is that of a guardian of the town's precious character, embodied most of all in the historic parts of the townscape which make up its heritage. In order that those areas receive the protection they deserve, a time when they have arguably never been more under threat, an informal group has been established to review and update the Conservation Area Statement for the town.

Harpenden Town Council (HTC) agreed at its early January meeting, to take the conservation area initiative under its wing, opening the way for discussions with St Albans District Council (SADC) on the best way to proceed at the all-important legislative planning level. It is universally acknowledged that a Conservation Area Statement is a vital part of a local authority's planning process in ensuring that the essential character of an area is retained.

The encouraging development has grown out of an initiative of two Harpenden Society members and Conservation Area residents, Nicola Ramsden and Chris Earnshaw, along with active participation by Cllr Roger Butterworth.

Also 'on board' is the town's long-established and very active Local History Society, as well of course as the Harpenden Society.

To help the process in establishing a formal Conservation Area Group, we are naturally keen to encourage any Harpenden Society members, especially those with knowledge and expertise on conservation and heritage issues, to 'come onboard' in driving the initiative forward.

Rosemary Ross, a stalwart of the town's Local History Society, says the emergence of an HTC-supported group to review the Conservation Area is most welcome. Its intended role should, she says, include a photographic survey of the many locally listed (ie protected) buildings within the conservation area, adding that the Local History Society has attempted to get volunteers interested in such a project, and some examples are on its (recently redesigned) website.

One hopes, says Rosemary, that it will become expected practice for the planning authorities to require a photographic record as evidence in any decision involving demolition or major adaptation. She welcomes proposals that the Conservation Area Group could start the survey of locally listed buildings, as well as notable houses and streetscapes outside the designated Conservation Area, as vital input to SADC's projected review of its planning strategies which, frustratingly, is at least two years away.



*Conservation Group striving to maintain our uniquely attractive townscape*

### **Society Awards 2021** **Time to think about nominations**

Nominations are invited, from Harpenden Society members, or from others in the town, for our 2021 Awards. Eligibility extends to imaginative townscape enhancements as well as new or extended/refurbished buildings. Suggestions should be forwarded to Awards Secretary Penny Ayres on [jandpalcock@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:jandpalcock@tiscali.co.uk)

# A walk on the wild (wet woodland) side

Batford Springs' impressive new boardwalk, across the area's previously inaccessible wet woodland close to the River Lea, was completed and opened to the public in December. The £100,000 project, given the green light in 2019, was led and funded by Harpenden Town Council with £7,500 of financial backing from the Harpenden Trust Community Fund. Further support came from the Batford Springs Volunteers group and Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust, the latter as host to the Upper Lea Catchment Partnership.

Among the declared objectives of the boardwalk project are: to 'increase public access to the river (visual and physical); increase local knowledge and appreciation of the river; and promote the river as an educational resource'. The aim was to make Batford Springs more accessible for members of the public, particularly those with mobility issues, enabling visitors to view the chalk streams (including former watercress beds) and reed fen area, crucially without disturbance to delicate habitats.

Wide mesh wire between the bottom and middle side rails prevents dogs from accessing those habitats from the boardwalk. Though its lateral footway boards can be slippery when wet, every third board incorporates a gritted non-slip strip. The existing footpath from the Station Road end of Marquis Lane, alongside the playing field, provides direct access to the southern end of the 300 yard-long boardwalk, while the other end meets the recently laid gravel path through Pinney's meadow connecting with All Saints Church car park.

Information boards at three strategic points along the zig-zag length of the boardwalk detail information about wildlife that can be seen on the reserve and about the local geology. Batford's natural springs are fed by artesian pressure, which occurs through the ground being made up of a mixture of impermeable clay and permeable chalk. Because the chalk stream is fed by artesian pressure from an underground aquifer, its temperature remains constant, at about 46degF (8degC), making it an important habitat for wildlife as it rarely freezes.

A feature of Batford Springs adjacent to the boardwalk is its newly-created reed fen, a natural pond of open still water. Its varying depths accommodate a diverse range of wildlife. The surrounding flora include water forget-me-not, yellow flag iris and purple loosestrife, providing dragonflies and damselflies with good places to lay their eggs. Meanwhile rushes and sedges help oxygenate the water and stabilise the banks of the pond.





The new boardwalk gives new opportunities for bird watchers. The Batford Springs nature reserve is notable for attracting a number of wading bird species, including resident heron and egret, as well as water rail and snipe which like to build their nests in nearby reeds.

Batford's wet woodland tree canopy, now more readily appreciated, thanks to the boardwalk, is made up of a mixture of poplar, aspen and willow – all wetland species – with some areas of hawthorn, elder and ash. The humid conditions around the willow trees are conducive to lichen growth, though deterioration in air quality in recent years has had a negative effect, as it has on mosses and liverworts.

Batford Springs nature reserve has, over recent decades, become one of Harpenden's most highly-prized areas of flora- and fauna-rich green environment. Local volunteers, initially in the early 1970s under the banner of the Upper Lea Valley Group, began work on ensuring its rural attractions were maintained, at the same time making it more visitor friendly, especially for young families living on that side of the town.



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## Sandy paths improve Southdown ponds access

Batford Springs nature reserve exemplifies the particular appeal of Harpenden's watery green spaces for everyone to enjoy, away from the town's built-up areas. Elsewhere, and of course closer to the High Street, are Southdown ponds on the eastern edge of the Common – another haven of flora and fauna. The latter notably includes a lively gaggle of resident ducks creating special delight for children, though recently installed notices request sternly that the ducks should not be fed.

The ponds, excavated in 1928 from former gravel pits, served initially to take overspill water from the Cock Pond in the High Street, opposite the Old Cock inn, via a channelled stream dubbed the 'River Harp' by locals. Nowadays they provide a run-off of potential street flooding water, albeit via a nine-metre long 'petrol interceptor' installed in 2004.

Harpenden Town Council has now made the ponds – on three descending levels and the two footbridges between them – more readily accessible, especially in winter months, through a resurfacing of the paths with sand, in preference to what had become somewhat slippery mud.



# Airport name change fails to deflect growth protests

Accusations from residents of Harpenden and the surrounding area have been levelled at Luton Airport's owner, namely the town's borough council, that the adoption 'out of the blue' of the newly-coined (and surely outlandish) name of '**Luton Rising**' – to replace 'London Luton Airport Ltd' – is an attempted distraction from its intention just two weeks later to approve an increase in flight operations from 18 to 19 million passengers per annum (ppa).



However, in the event, that capacity increase decision was, to the relief of many objectors, thwarted three days before Christmas when the Secretary of State directed Luton Borough Council not to issue a decision notice on the expansion until a central government decision had been taken on whether the application would be 'called in' for independent review. It follows vigorous protest submissions from local MPs including Harpenden's Bim Afolami, Herts County Council and St Albans District Council, as well as anti-noise pressure groups, notably LADACAN and HarpendenSky .

The reason this matters, as pointed out by LADACAN, is the precedent created in respect of a planned expansion of Southampton Airport, when the (now bizarrely-named) Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities didn't issue such a directive, and then took so long to decide about a 'call in' that the local authority ratified the decision, leaving objectors to fund a Judicial Review.

The November 18 name change announcement from LBC proclaimed that 'We're not so much a business as a movement, working in partnerships that enable lives to be transformed and communities to thrive. Our new name and strapline – **Luton Rising: our airport, our community, our planet** – embody these values. We look forward to sharing our exciting journey with you'.

Immediate social media reactions to the name change from LLAL to Luton Rising (at a reported cost to Luton council tax payers of £10,000) were largely and perhaps predictably scornful. Here are a selection:

'...the idiots in charge really do not live in the real world;

'Why can't the council deal with real issues...instead of wasting money...that nobody gets any benefit from?';

'To me it's still Luton Airport and always will be';

'Who comes up with these ridiculous ideas? Why not put the £10,000 into the care system which is in dire need of help';

'Luton Rising sounds like a high-rise building development';

'It's not April the first is it?';

'Dropping the word London would have been enough';

'If you put lipstick on a pig it's still a pig!'

'You can't polish a turd'

Reactions to LBC's initial airport capacity increase approval, to 19 million ppa, were hardly less flattering. The Harpenden Society has pointed out that the headline go-ahead was accompanied by a relaxation of some of the binding conditions imposed when the increase to 18mppa was sanctioned in 2014, especially relating to noise. In particular the Airbus A321neo operated by Wizz Air and easyJet has proved noisier than predicted when fully laden in the steep urban area clearance take-off mode demanded at Luton.

It was apparent at the LBC (or Luton Rising?) meeting which approved the 19 million ppa airport capacity escalation, that the hugely greater increase, much vaunted in pre-Covid days, to 32mppa, was now regarded much more circumspectly by many Luton councillors, for broader environmental reasons. Climate change is likely to be front and centre in their future deliberations and in those of central government who, it is expected, would be the final arbiter on such a major expansion approval.

Meanwhile a LADACAN member who attended the meeting described it as 'an evening of thuggery and deceit; that objectors' concerns about the environmental impact of the expansion were brushed aside and that carefully researched evidence was casually dismissed'. The council had, in the noise protest group's words, 'incentivised the growth which broke its own planning conditions'.



Graham Olver, CEO, Luton Rising

# Bank closure challenges alas remain

In our Autumn newsletter we highlighted the widespread concern of Harpenden residents – and, just as critically, local businesses – about the looming threat of bank closures. A recent change-of-use planning application for Barclays' site, if implemented, adds urgency to the situation, potentially leaving only HSBC providing full banking facilities.

We are not alone of course – over 4000 bank branches have disappeared across the country in the last five years. A key reason is that the closure of a branch in a mid-size town is reckoned to save a bank around £350,000 a year. But in doing so the banks inflict acute inconvenience, indeed real suffering, on volunteer groups and charities who need to bank cash takings, as well as on those many residents not familiar with electronic banking, but who need access to a bank for legal and administrative services.

Long time Harpenden resident and Society member Derek French, who has been active for many years in campaigning nationally for the provision of local bank services, spelled out forcefully in an article in December in the Financial Times the need for an alternative model for local banking. There he acknowledged the work of the **Access to Cash Action Group (ACAG)**, which is calling for the provision of local banking 'hubs' as a common sense solution in towns such as Harpenden.

ACAG's proposals follow the pattern set by the 'BankHUB' established at Rochford in Essex, described in our earlier newsletter report and which, for expediency, uses the Post Office's electronic banking system, though is separate from Post Office counter operations. It is an eminently sensible approach to an inevitably growing and urgent problem.

There has been a 'promise' (necessarily in quotes) from the Government that legislation will be enacted this year to 'protect' access to local banking, but there are indications that such 'protection' might well be restricted to the availability of ATM cash dispensers, which goes nowhere near the strategy advocated by ACAG.

Meanwhile, a specific real life example of Harpenden's bank closure challenges has recently come to light. Local councillor Allison Wren reports that the mobile fish seller who markets her produce from Grimsby every Tuesday can no longer bank her cash takings in the town. She is loath to accumulate large sums of cash in her van so has reluctantly decided to accept card-only payments from her customers, which alas reduces her net takings by several percent.



*Our Barclays bank now under threat*

## Squash Club facing 'shock' eviction

Members of Harpenden's long-established Squash Racquets Club have received an unexpected 'notice to quit' its facilities at Harpenden Rugby Football Club's premises in Redbourn Lane.

It has come as a shock to the Squash Club's 250 individual, family and junior members, potentially destroying its 53 years legacy. The eviction notice requests the club – one of the largest and most influential in Hertfordshire – to leave by this coming April.

The club is renowned country-wide for top-level as well as grass roots squash. Its members include several England Masters international players and a number of current Junior County Champions.

As Phil Waters, a member of the Herts Sports Partnership (which encourages participation in sport at all levels of the community) and chairman of the Harpenden Society, points out, 'a thriving community needs to offer its members a wide range of sports, so the loss of the Squash Club would be a huge blow for the town'.

It is hoped that negotiations between the two sports clubs can enable squash to continue being played at Redbourn Lane at least until an alternative facility has been found.

## Come and look after our membership!

The Harpenden Society is looking for a new Membership Secretary after the present holder of the role steps down for health reasons. It involves principally maintaining our membership records (primarily on an Excel spreadsheet), while working with our Treasurer to follow up subscription payments (now mainly via standing order) and with our newsletter distributors to update delivery details.

In a more proactive capacity the Membership Secretary has a more 'promotional' role in our ongoing efforts to encourage new members, notably at Society-organised meetings and other public events, as well as liaising with the newsletter distribution team.

If you are interested and would like to know more about what is involved in a not-too-demanding role, please contact Society Secretary Bob Fletcher on [secretary@harpendensociety.org](mailto:secretary@harpendensociety.org)

# Public Halls site project moves forward

Two years on from the publication of outline plans for the redevelopment of the Harpenden Public Halls site, St Albans District Council, as the landowner, has announced its submission of a planning application, broadly in line with the final drawings evolved from the design charette in 2019, which allowed Harpenden townspeople to help formulate the plans. Consultation input also came from Harpenden Town Council and the town's Neighbourhood Plan, says SADC.



It is proposed to demolish the existing buildings and construct four new blocks comprising ten social housing units, 19 flats for sale and 3460 square feet of 'commercial space', the nature of which has yet to be determined. The development would include 29 car parking spaces – 23 more than originally proposed.

There would be proper footpath access (not just a narrow alleyway) from the Common to Arden Grove, while two green spaces between the accommodation

blocks would include a 'courtyard'. Images accompanying the SADC announcement show substantial, and clearly welcome, tree planting, notably along the Common-side boundary of the site .

Money raised from the project will, says SADC, help pay for the near £20 million cost of the Harpenden leisure centre complex, including the Eric Morecambe Centre, in Rothamsted Park.

## Reminder:

### 2022 subs now due

For those Harpenden Society members who don't pay their annual subscription by Standing Order can we remind you politely that 2022 subscriptions (£8 single/ £10 family) are now due. Payment should be made into the Society's bank account – sort code 60-10-07, account number 28772946 – or by cheque made payable to 'The Harpenden Society' to our Treasurer Harry Downie at 66 Eastmoor Park, Harpenden AL5 1BW. Direct any subscription queries please to the [treasurer@harpendsociety.org](mailto:treasurer@harpendsociety.org)

Could all members let us know if their home address, email address or telephone number have changed...Thanks. Contact [membership@harpendsociety.org](mailto:membership@harpendsociety.org)

## Children and air pollution.

### What should I worry about?

### And what can I do?



### Guest Speaker 'Dr. Abigail Whitehouse

Academic Clinical Lecturer in the Queen Mary, (London), University Centre for Genomics and Child Health.

will discuss the effects of air pollution on children, present the latest research, and advise on how we can all act to improve the air we breathe'.

**A 45 minute presentation followed by 45 minute Q&A**

### Public Meeting

7.30pm start Thursday  
April 21

Katherine Warington  
School

Book your seat now via  
the Society web site

MEETING ORGANISED BY



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

# Did You Know? From Harpenden's history A musical legacy

On the southern corner of Townsend Lane and Salisbury Avenue stands The Bourne. Today it comprises a small cul-de-sac of 1990s apartments. But its thankfully retained 'centre piece' is the imposing house which bore the same name from before the Second World War.

It was in 1938 that Mr G H T Williams took up residence at The Bourne. Born in 1888 in Bethnal Green in the East End of London, George Williams and his wife attended Victoria Park Methodist Church, Bonner Road – close to where the National Children's Home had its origins before it later became established at Highfield Oval.

Williams came from a family of tool makers in London and, round about the time he moved house to The Bourne, he set up his business, called Lark Tools, in St Albans Road, Sandridge. For many decades Harpenden commuters on their way home could look out of their train windows to see the prominent sign on the factory roof 'Where Lark Tools Are Made', which told them they were just a few minutes away from arriving at Harpenden Station.

During the war Williams made his fortune manufacturing munitions. Clearly no pacifist, he was nevertheless a staunch Methodist and a regular attendee at High Street Methodist Church in Harpenden. He is remembered as quite a small man but well-built with a large bushy moustache, glasses and pouting lips, was very outspoken – with a Cockney accent – and was definite in his views.

However, he was generous towards the church and the NCH, and was known for helping people with interest-free loans, telling them to 'pay me back when yer can'. He notably paid for one gifted violinist to go to music college and supported him until he made a successful career as a professional musician.

He drove a large Armstrong Siddeley car and he and his wife, Muriel, would often take widows from the church out to tea on Sundays, allegedly terrifying them as he sped through narrow lanes. He also chauffeured Methodist local preachers, who did not drive themselves, to their preaching appointments at the smaller outlying chapels in the Harpenden Circuit, such as Gaddesden Row and Trowley Hill.

Williams loved music and played the piano and organ, though surprisingly he couldn't read music; all his hymn books were written in tonic sol-fa. His ambition was to have a music room built on to The Bourne and eventually, in 1959/60, his dream was not only realised but exceeded, in the shape of what could truly be called a concert hall on the site – an architecturally beautiful building with a stage at one end, a minstrel's gallery along one wall and windows looking out towards the large garden.



*The Bourne as it is today, minus its former adjoining concert hall/music room.*

It had a basement which housed the a pump for the organ as well as the heating boiler and cloakrooms. The history of The Bourne's organ is of particular note. It was originally built in 1893 by Binns, then famous as organ builders in the late 19th Century, for St George's Church in London's Victoria Park, Hackney. It was badly damaged during the war, but Williams bought it and it was temporarily stored at Gaddesden Place, the 18th Century country house near Hemel Hempstead. He engaged a firm from Clevedon in Somerset to rebuild and update the organ.

In his will George Williams left the major part of his estate to create a school of church music. Sadly, estate duty swallowed much of the money. But the Williams School of Church Music trust was nevertheless established, albeit with only limited funding, which made subsequent development difficult. But after his death in 1968, aged 80, the Methodist Music Society was helpful and the Rev Dr Francis Westbrook was appointed as Principal of the school. He and his wife lived in the house at The Bourne. The school opened in May 1971. At its dedication service Dr Lloyd Webber, father of Andrew (now Lord) Lloyd Webber played the organ.

The Bourne became the home of Harpenden Musicale in 1986, the base for a boys' and a women's choir under the direction of Clive Bright who organised lectures as well as concerts in the concert hall. He formed an amateur chamber orchestra as well as both a boys' and a women's choir and set up musical appreciation classes. He organised lectures and regular concerts by local choirs.

Sadly the only way to keep what became the Williams Church Music Trust functioning was to sell The Bourne's house and land for redevelopment.

**Acknowledgement:  
Harpenden Local History Society**

# EDITOR'S VIEW

Alan Bunting

## Pedestrianisation – the ructions rumble on

No local issue has prompted more starkly divided opinions in the last year or two than the temporary pedestrianisation of Lower High Street and Bowers Parade. It was a 'disaster' cried many of the shopkeepers, resulting they said, in a significant footfall reduction and, by implication, a loss in turnover, putting the viability of some retailer businesses on a knife edge. They were, to no one's surprise, accordingly vociferous in welcoming the 'return to normal' in mid October, when Covid-related traffic and parking restrictions were (more suddenly than expected) lifted.

But there were equally strong views on the other side of the argument, welcoming what was seen by a percentage of shoppers as a calmer, more pedestrian-friendly environment, without the hassle and noxious emissions of passing traffic as drivers sought parking places.

Under the now resumed restriction-free conditions, the chances of finding a space to park along Bowers Parade or Lower High Street on any day of the week, at least in daytime, are in reality slim. If you find a parking slot you consider yourself extremely lucky.

To borrow a well-worn axiom, one cannot please all the people all the time, but it should be possible to please all of them some of the time. In other words there ought to be a pedestrianisation compromise. As we reported in our Autumn newsletter, Harpenden Town Council wants to explore the allocation and relative pricing of paid-for off-street parking for specific users, as part of a 'zonal' approach which would extend beyond just parking.

Those specific users should include, as well as the disabled of course, shop and supermarket employees of necessarily limited means, for whom some kind of all-day parking voucher scheme would need to be



instituted. But where would they park? Those advocating complete and permanent pedestrianisation along that contentious stretch of town centre thoroughfare say, somewhat glibly, that such parking can be provide 'nearby'.

But how near is 'nearby'? Bowers Way public car park is arguably the closest to the town centre, with the one in Amenbury Lane marginally further away. Reaching either from the High Street involves negotiating a gradient, albeit of minor concern to those in their sprightly prime, but for others maybe enough of a deterrent to push would-be shoppers towards the likes of Amazon online rather than 'shopping local', which is vigorously encouraged.

It is therefore this particular Editor's View that there are no easy answers to the pedestrianisation conundrum. But if any Harpenden Society members have a ready-made solution up their sleeves please let us have it on [editor@harpendsociety.org](mailto:editor@harpendsociety.org)



*Lower High Street: Shoppers vs retailers means pedestrians versus cars*

### Wordsmith wanted

Readers might well have noticed that this quarterly newsletter has, over the last two or three years, boosted its coverage, we would like to think in quality as well as quantity, to deal with a more diverse range of local issues. It has of course involved an increasing amount of research as well as writing for Alan Bunting, who has been editor since 2015.

In order to spread the editorial load we would be pleased to hear from any society member with wordsmith aspirations, or actual experience, who would like to come on board and help to put together those pages which many members say they eagerly await every three months. Would anyone who's interested please contact Alan on [editor@harpendsociety.org](mailto:editor@harpendsociety.org).  
**Phil Waters, Chairman**

Please send comments on articles or any other issues raised in this edition to the editor: Alan Bunting  
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