

THE HARPENDEN SOCIETY COMMITTEE MEETING
Monday 14 May 2025 at 2.00 p.m.
3 Longcroft Avenue
MINUTES

1. Present

Jeff Phillips (JP), Paul Gloess (PGs), Harry Downie (HD), Ron Taylor (RT), John Lowe (JL), Alan Bunting (AB) and Bob Fletcher (RF).

2. In Attendance

Roger Butterworth (RB).

3. Apologies for absence

These were received from Martyn Reed (MR) and Ian Barrison (IB).

4. Past Meeting Minutes

Minutes of the meeting on 3 March 2025, previously circulated, were approved as a true record.

5. Matters Arising from Minutes

PG reported that the Society's plaque beside the ponds on the Common had fallen down and was in a state of disrepair. PG agreed to find the plaque and its stand on his way home and try to get it repaired and reinstalled.

6. Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer's Report had been circulated by HD prior to the meeting. HD reported that he had transferred the requested money from the current account to the interest-bearing account.

7. Secretary's Items.

RF reported that the email informing members of the upcoming AGM on the 21 May had been sent out and the first voting forms had been received.

8. Chairman's Items.

(a) Local Plan

- I. JP reported that the Local Plan inspectors held their first Q&A last week, and he was able to watch the first two afternoons (Tues & Weds) and the whole of the final session on Thursday 1st May. This was an event where the attendees, in addition to Chris Briggs for SADC, was largely made up primarily of developers and their representatives. However, there were a number of interested parties who had objected to the Plan, namely CPRE, the North St Albans group (Gee Smedley) and their colleagues from Chiswell Green.
- II. This was Stage 1 of the Inspectors questioning, and its focus was on the council's derivation and identification of assessed need, the issue of housing mix (social/affordable and bed numbers per unit), and the process of identification of sites that were proposed (or rejected), both brown field and Green Belt, and the definition of towns and villages in terms of suitability for development.
- III. Not surprisingly, the developers were pushing to include their clients' sites, where they were excluded (in whole and in part), and density (which the Inspectors clearly stated was an issue for their Stage 2 sessions).

- IV. Interestingly, a number of developers claimed that there were brown field sites excluded from the Plan (which Chris Briggs defended well on grounds on inappropriateness) and which were available now.
- V. There was no discussion on infrastructure as that is to be covered in later sessions, except for the input from National Highways in respect of the impacts on their managed roads, not least as they connect with other authorities' geography (no mention of HCC!).
- VI. However, the National Highways input was subject to questioning which has requires them to submit more detailed answers, and which Chris Briggs stated was unlikely to be forthcoming before the end of June.
- VII. There was no discussion on access to rail facilities, other than recording what was included in the Plan which caused the Chiswell Green lead to complain that it was misleading to represent the community as having significant access to two rail lines - the Watford branch line and the main line at St Albans.
- VIII. JP reported that he was impressed by the Inspectors approach and clarity of questioning.

(b) Unitary Authority

- I. JP reported that he and RB met with Carl Cheevers on the matter of the Government proposals for local authority reorganisation, and the creation of unitary authorities. Carl was clear that whatever the outcome, the Town Council would be looking to get additional responsibilities and related assets (subject to adequate funding!), but asked The Society not to enter the public domain with our views until the Government had seen the submissions from all existing local authorities, and determined the next steps. This has been scheduled for mid-May but may now be delayed.
- II. What we have heard is that the 10 district councils have submitted a proposal for up to 5 new authorities in Hertfordshire, plus the existing County Council. It was thought that this approach will not be acceptable and will not survive.

(c) Parking In Harpenden

- I. JP reported Paul de Kort (Leader of SADC) had issued a statement , following pressure from the Society and others and more recently, our MP, that SADC will undertake a review of the parking regime after it's been operating for 12 months, with a view to simplification.

(d) JP thanked Karl Wingfield for the excellent work put in over the last few years as leader of the Transport Working Group.

9. Membership Secretary's Items

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

We have 495 (was 497) memberships covering 754 names plus 24 Organisations listed that receive our complimentary newsletters (16 Schools, Town Council, Library, Herts Archives, 3 Local papers, Lea Springs & St Albans Civic Society).

10. Newsletter Editor's Items

RT reported that the following content is under review for publication early June; report on Local Plan hearings and infrastructure, AGM report, photo competition report, Awards, Helping Hand & Harpenden Hopper, Learning for Leisure, Citizens Advice, Beacon House story, Ron's Retail round Up, Summer events, Airport update, Rennie Grove

11. Publicity

RT reported that there has been ongoing media coverage on the Photo Competition & the AGM. The ongoing parking situation has been an active topic in the Herts Ad, St Albans Times and Harpendia.

12. Social Media

(a) The Social Media report had been circulated by MR prior to the meeting. Regular postings are being made to the Facebook and Nextdoor sites. Facebook followers are now at 390, up 10 since the last meeting.

(b) Photography Competition

MR reported that we had 24 images submitted by 10 individuals and the 5 prize winners were announced at the Harpenden Photographic Society exhibition on 25th April. As there were no entries in the junior category the prize money awarded was half that budgeted at £375.

Initial interest in the competition was low, and MR stated that he was thankful to Ron for his suggestions to simplify, and his moral and practical support in its relaunch. MR also stated that he was thankful to committee members for their input into selecting the winners.

13. Awards

RT reported that the 2024 awards are as follows:

Prestige Plaques:

The Harpenden History Museum in the Eric Morecambe Centre. An important centre of Local History & Archives plus their regular special exhibitions.

The Lea Grange Care Home in Coldharbour Lane. A much needed 24-hour residential, nursing, dementia and respite care within an environment purpose-built unit for the practical delivery of high-quality care.

Certificate of Merit: The All-Weather pitch at Katherine Warrington School - A fantastic 3G Facility for students at KWS and the local community especially Wheathampsted Wanderers their partner club.

Letters of Commendation:

Brad & Dills Park Cafe in Rothamsted Park- transforming the old cafe/ restaurant

The Harpenden Trust Halls in Southdown - newly refurbished for community use

14. History Society

(a) The History Society report had been circulated by RB prior to the meeting.

(b) RB reported about the History Society's upcoming programme of talks.

I. The programme begins at 8pm, Tuesday, 27 May with My Year as High Sheriff by Annie Brewster, JP, High Sheriff of Hertfordshire 2024-25.

II. The second lecture, on Tuesday, 24 June is a double bill comprising, first, Methodism in Harpenden by Rev Mark Hammond, High Street Methodist Church and, second, Selection of Harpenden Folk from the new Station Road Pedestrian Tunnel Mural by Alison Bourke, who devised the mural, painted last year.

III. Finally, on Tuesday, 22 July will be Son of Harpenden, Hero in China – George Hogg 1915-45 by Mark Thomas, Hogg's nephew and biographer, on the exact 80th anniversary of George Hogg's death. Hogg was born, brought up and educated in Harpenden – at St George's School. On a world tour after graduation, he ended up in China, where he stayed for 7 years at the time of the Japanese war. Heroically, he saved the lives of 60 boys by leading them out of a war zone, marching them 700 miles to the edge of the Gobi Desert and re-establishing their school in a safer location.

15. Transport Working Group

MR reported that the follow up meeting of the Transport Forum, postponed from 30th January, has not yet been re-organised.

16. Health & Social Welfare Working Group

IB reported that:

- (a) A new service has been made available this year to adults who are in need of urgent mental health support. The Mental Health Urgent Care Centre (MHUCC) is open 24/7 at the Lister Hospital Campus in Stevenage. It is being provided by HPFT – the Hertfordshire Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust. The facility offers an alternative to long waits and crowded spaces for those in a mental health crisis. It aims to provide a comprehensive assessment within a few hours of a patient arriving at the centre. The team works with the patients to create a care plan. This could be support to keep the patient safe at home or transfer to an inpatient bed.
- (b) New Services are being introduced at St Albans City Hospital. Three new operating theatres and a new surgical procedure room should be open in May 25.
- (c) The future of the Mount Vernon Cancer Centre has been the subject of a review, which concluded that the best option was to be co-located in the eventual new Watford General Hospital site.
- (d) It has been confirmed that the redevelopment of Watford General Hospital is going ahead as part of the New Hospital Programme. Unfortunately, the earliest start date for building on the Watford site is 2032, and may be as late as 2034. This delay will increase the need for West Herts Trust to spend precious capital funding, on maintaining a rapidly deteriorating building fabric, and implies at least 10 years, and probably longer, before the new hospital and the Mount Vernon Cancer Centre are up and running.
- (e) The General Medical Council approved the first stage of the University of Hertfordshire's application to establish an Undergraduate Medical School. The first wave of fee paying International students are scheduled to start in September 2026 followed by UK students in September 2027. Eventually, 70 students will be enrolled each year.

17. Built Environment Working Group

The low number of applications for residential extensions etc continues.

Set out below is a review of the larger applications/proposals under consideration: -

- (a) Land to north west of Harpenden – (5/2023/0327) – Carla Homes

Council have resolved to grant Outline Consent subject to Sec 106 Agreement being completed within 6 months from Feb 2025.

- (b) Land to north of Wheathampstead Road – (5/2022/2748)

The Council have approved access arrangements to proposed site, provided it is not called in by Sec of State and subject to completion of Sec 106 Agreement within 6 months from Dec 2024.

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

The Council have determined the Scoping Application, and CN will now have to submit a detailed Environment Impact Assessment with their Planning Application to address the issues which are "Scoped In".

- (d) Land to South of Greenacres, Lower Luton Rd – Ref No 5/2025/0362

Miller Homes submitted Screening Opinion for up to 100 dwellings, on site adjoining CN site in March 2025. The Council have confirmed that an Environmental Statement is NOT required

18. Economic Activity Working Group

RT reported that the parking issues continue to dominate the news. The two surveys have been conducted. The retailer views survey received 16 responses from 29 businesses; the Society Members' survey received 50 responses. The survey results have been circulated to the committee members.

19. AOB

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

Dates of the next Public Meetings: Being organised.

The meeting closed at 15.45.