

THE HARPENDEN SOCIETY COMMITTEE MEETING
Monday 7 July 2025 at 9.00 a.m.
HTC Council Chamber
MINUTES

1. Present

Jeff Phillips (JP), Harry Downie (HD), Ian Barrison (IB) and Bob Fletcher (RF).

2. In Attendance

None.

3. Apologies for absence

These were received from Paul Gloess (PGs), Roger Butterworth (RB), Ron Taylor (RT), John Lowe (JL), Alan Bunting (AB) and Martyn Reed (MR).

4. Past Meeting Minutes

Minutes of the meeting on 14 May 2025, previously circulated, were approved as a true record.

5. Matters Arising from Minutes

None.

6. Treasurer's Report

- (a) HD reported that the current and forecast expenditure indicated that the Society would be close to break even for this financial year.
- (b) Due to HD serving as Treasurer for many years and wishing to step down from the role in the near future John Bristow has agreed to become Treasurer formally commencing in the new financial year.

7. Secretary's Items.

- (c) RF reported that company used for the committee group email address (gaggle mail) was now starting to charge for the service. It was agreed that around £60 could be spent on this service until an alternative service could be found.
- (d) RF also reported that consideration was being given to using the Methodist Church for future public meetings. RF will contact John Bristow (treasurer of the History Society) to discuss their experiences of using the Methodist Church for public meetings.

8. Chairman's Items.

- (a) JP reported that he thought the public meeting in May was excellent, with Stuart Roberts' entertaining talk on local farming and food production neatly dovetailing with Katharine Tate's very interesting session on diet, and particularly her advice on the impact of diet on holding back traits of dementia. It's just a shame that we only encouraged 40 or so of our membership to attend.
- (b) JP reported that Stuart Roberts recently became a County Councillor and is on the HCC Transport Committee. JP reported that he and Stuart have agreed to meet later in July to talk through current concerns, but more importantly, the potential for the Local Plan's implementation to make matters significantly worse. Stuart understands the pressure the town is under and is amenable to arrange for MR and JP to have a meeting with Stephen Giles-Medhurst, the newly appointed chair of the County Transport Committee.
- (c) JP reported that he and MR have crafted a briefing note which JP will send to our MP, Victoria Collins, before JP meets with Victoria at lunchtime on the 7th July. The briefing note will focus on the issues

associated with the need for a holistic approach to the Local Plan's roll out – and the question of who polices it.

- (d) in recent days, there has been press reports associated with the Unitary Authority debate, and the interview with Paul de Kort. This is still in an embryonic state, with the 10 Hertfordshire districts still unclear as to their final position, but it is clear that a single authority has been unanimously rejected. The nub of the issue for us is not only where the Government lands on the number of authorities involved for Hertfordshire (2, 3 or 4??), but more importantly, the roles and responsibilities of any structure below that of the unitary authority. It seems clear that HTC will be looking to acquire more assets, but our concern is that whatever they pitch for, it must be adequately funded within the overall level of Council Tax charged prior to transfer.
- (e) JP stated that his view remains that the Society needs to keep a close watching brief on developments and go public with such views that we may hold once we see where the Town Council is formally headed in response to the Government's policy statement that follows their consultation.
- (f) A public meeting could be arranged with Carl Chivers, Paul de Kort etc., specifically on the reorganization once further progress has been made.
- (g) JP reported that whilst Victoria Collins' public meeting on 16th October is focused on her year at Westminster, he was sure she will be prepared for questions on both the Local Plan and local government reorganisation.

9. **Membership Secretary's Items**

Nothing to report this time.

10. **Newsletter Editor's Items**

Spring /Summer Newsletter. This has been printed and is with the distribution team for delivery to member's homes

11. **Publicity**

RT reported that there has been ongoing media coverage of the AGM/Public Meeting in Herts Ad, St Albans Times and Harpendia.

Arts Competition with Harpenden's United Nations division - A draft proposal has been issued to head teachers/ heads of Art at: KWS. SJL. St George's, Roundwood Park and The Kings School. All have expressed a keen interest and await a Launch document in early Sept. This is to be reviewed once the new term is up and running. Suheil Shahryar (Harpenden UN head) and RT are working on the document during July/Aug.

12. **Social Media**

- (a) MR reported that the Society would benefit from more web content from members and prospective members. Members will only value the society if they know about the good work that we do.
- (b) Facebook followers are now at 393, up 3 since the last meeting and 103 more than the 290 when MR started.

13. **Awards**

RT reported that he will be ordering the Plaques and Certificates on his return from holiday. Arrangements for the presentations to the winners will then be made.

14. **History Society**

(a) **Conservation Area Character Statement Working Party**

- I. The volunteers provided a draft new Character Statement to the St Albans conservation officer in June. As a result, the working party was disbanded, it's work having concluded.

- II. The work took over 3 years, with various twists and turns as guidance given by the successive conservation officers was found not to be helpful and/or “developed” (that is changed over time). The current conservation officer is engaged in the task and wishes to complete it by the end of 2025. Finalisation now rests quite properly with SADC.
- III. It is not known if SADC will want it to be known that Harpenden & District Local History Society and Harpenden Society contributed to the process.

(b) Harpenden & District Local History Society

- I. Monthly lecture attendance rose in steps over the six months from September last to April from about 80 to 210, forcing a move to the EMC auditorium for the three months February to April. In May, with the major works at High Street Methodist Church complete (pews removed) the History Society relocated lectures there. The Methodist Church AV technology is state of the art – that at EMC is ropey and unreliable. Additionally the Methodist Church is half the hire charge, inclusive of a recording, which was not possible in the auditorium. However, attendance dropped to 80, then 95 at the June lecture. We expected some drop off: people don’t like change, and the EMC auditorium gave a sense of “theatre”. The marketing (posters, social media and press releases) was stepped up in February, and this continues.
- II. Museum attendance also dropped in June. A press release on the current special exhibition on WW2 appeared in Herts Ad and St Albans Times recently. It remains to be seen if that raises numbers.

15. Transport Working Group

MR reported that the follow up meeting postponed from 30th January has not been re-organised. MR has been in contact with Karl Wingfield to test understanding on a couple of matters and to seek his advice on future priorities. MR and JP have met to discuss potential areas of interest on which to focus. This will be explored with trustees and then, possibly, members.

A letter has been drafted to send to Victoria Collins requesting HCC review Harpenden’s road network in light of airport expansion and two likely developments in North East and North West Harpenden.

16. Health & Social Welfare Working Group

IB reported that:

(a) Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board

- I. In recent months, the Government has announced major plans to reduce the running costs of some NHS organisations, including ICBs. As a result, the ICB has been asked to reduce its running costs by 50 per cent by the end of December 2025. This is in addition to the 30% savings the Board has been working towards since 2023.
- II. Since this news was revealed, work has been underway to plan how the Board can achieve this, with the national body NHS England issuing a ‘blueprint’ which lays out new ways of working for ICBs. ICB functions will change, and the total number of ICBs will reduce as larger ICB footprints are established.
- III. Along with all the other ICBs the Board has been asked to form ‘clusters’ within our region, to help deliver functions more efficiently by working together across bigger geographies. The current proposal would see the Hertfordshire part of our ICB footprint brought together with the Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes (BLMK) ICB area and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough (C&P) ICB area, to form a larger single organisation.
- IV. A separate ‘Greater Essex’ ICB would be created (including the west Essex area of the Board’s current footprint), alongside a new Norfolk and Suffolk ICB. The formation of a Greater Essex

ICB would align with Essex County Council's devolution proposals and Norfolk and Suffolk leaders are progressing plans for a Mayoral Combined County Authority'

- V. Comment - There has been no public consultation concerning the wisdom of these boundary realignments. The Herts County Council Health and Scrutiny Committee does a good job keeping the ICB on its toes. How this will work with two or three non co terminus Hertfordshire Council clusters is unclear.

(b) Watford Hospital News

- I. Plans to rebuild Watford General Hospital have taken a major step forward after the government committed to fund close to £12 million on the scheme. The money will be used to deliver the next phase of preparing the site for the new building along with funding a project team to drive forward this critical next stage of the project.
- II. In January, the government announced its review into the New Hospital Programme (NHP) and provided a new timetable for delivering the schemes across the country. Ministers confirmed that Watford General would be funded and rebuilt. Negotiations have been continuing with the NHP on two key aspects of the work: moving ahead with enabling works to prepare the site for the new building and retaining a project team to progress this.
- III. Following confirmation this week that the NHP had committed £11.86 million for the next phase of works, Matthew Coats, chief executive of WHTH, said: "This marks a major step forward in our project and a sign of confidence from the government in our plans. We now have the money we need for this year to continue our preparations for the main build. The cash will be used to deliver new power supplies for the site, remove the Granger Ward, and demolish the Pathology and Medical Assessment Unit buildings to prepare for the next phase of the project."
- IV. Comment- The recent government spending review failed to identify any extra and earlier capital spend for the New Hospital Programme, therefore the Watford rebuild is still scheduled for 2032 onwards.

(c) Harpenden PCN Vaccinations

For those in the Harpenden PCN area, specifically those aged 75 and over, the recommended vaccinations include RSV, Shingles, Pneumococcal, and COVID-19. The RSV vaccine is being offered to those turning 75 on or after September 1, 2024, as part of a routine program. A catch-up program is also in place for those aged 75-79 already. Additionally, adults in this age group are eligible for Shingles and Pneumococcal vaccines, which may be offered at the same time as the RSV vaccine to reduce appointments. The COVID-19 vaccine is also recommended, with a minimum interval of 3 months since any previous dose.

17. Built Environment Working Group

The low number of applications for residential extensions etc continues.

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

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

No additional information has been posted since Feb 2025.

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

No additional information has been posted since Nov 2024.

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

No additional information has been posted.

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

No additional information has been posted.

(e) Land opposite 27-39 Common Lane Harpenden – Ref No: - 5/2025/0668

Application submitted for 8 self-build detached homes on strip of land backing onto KW School. This relates to the land that was conveniently held back from Compulsory Purchase when the school was being planned. There are suggestions that a “deal” was done with HCC as they needed some of the farmland for drainage of the school site and the quid pro quo was that they would be allowed to develop site. The land is within Green Belt and there are no compelling reasons why development should be permitted. Many objections lodged by nearby residents who have made very sound comments.

(f) Townsend Lane Harpenden

Rothamsted has agreed an option with a developer, Hill, to build on the field between Hartwell Gardens and Townsend Nursery, subject to obtaining planning. No application has yet been submitted but indicative layout shows about 40 houses, being a mix of detached and semis – probably the Affordable element. The site was identified by the council in the draft plan, so it would seem fairly certain that consent will be obtained.

18. Economic Activity Working Group

- (a) Several retailers have reported reasonable business with parking issues being less problematic. However, several independents are still not back to normal and HTC has agreed a motion to approach SADC again with a request for immediate review.
- (b) Parking charges - Stage 2 of our research to monitor trading results of retailers and shopping views of our members during May-July will be implemented end July. I will be working on the 2 questionnaires on my return from holiday and then issuing end July

19. AOB

None.

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

Dates of the next Public Meetings: 16 October – Victoria Collins MP

The meeting closed at 10.35