



## THE LIBRARY—OPEN ALL (WELL, MORE) HOURS



In a polished example of partnership between local authority and voluntary body, the Hertfordshire Library Service and The Harpenden Society have signed a contract whereby The Society will operate a Library Express service on Wednesday afternoons. Hitherto the library was closed on Wednesday afternoon, the only session of the week when the library was closed altogether. Henceforward the front part of the library will again be open for business from 13.00 to 19.00 hours.

Library Express includes the issue and return of books and other loaned materials at the self-service kiosks and the ability to renew items, pay overdue charges and check items that are on loan. Reserved books may be collected and access to the two 30 minute non-bookable computers is also possible. The fuller range of library services, such as enquiries, scanning, photographing and printing from computers, is excluded.

Since its removal to the prime 'Argos' site, library membership and usage has boomed and it seemed to The Society that it was imperative that something should be done to ensure there was no 'shut-down' during the high street's bustling week. Amiable and practical negotiations principally with Taryn Pearson, Herts chief librarian (see page 3 for her inspiring talk at The Society's December public meeting) and Claire Barraclough, Mid-Herts Area Librarian, were smoothly pursued. The plan was laid.

It all depended then on two elements. First, would The Society's members answer the call? Yes, they would. Over twenty volunteers sprang forward and others have followed. Second, would one of them be willing and able to take on the role of organiser of this intrepid volunteer group? Yes, she was

and is. Liz Trounce valorously grasped at the nettle and has proved exceptionally effective and careful in plotting the schedule of how teams of volunteers will run an otherwise unstaffed library every Wednesday after one o'clock.

Chris Marsden, The Society's ebullient chairman, invited everyone to a wine and nibbles inaugural party at his home on 17 December and, apart from being a jovial affair that revealed the healthy enthusiasm of the volunteers, it provided an opportunity for Claire Barraclough and Liz Trounce to answer questions and listen to comments. There was an initial training session at the library on Wednesday 15 January – and then came the big day...

At 13.00 hours on Wednesday 22 January The Harpenden Society officially took possession of the town's much-admired library. And the first two pioneers – comparable with the first two astronauts who stepped on to the moon – were Geoff Thiel and Colin Hill, proudly wearing their Harpenden Society Volunteer badges.

If all goes well, and the omens are propitious, it is entirely feasible that volunteering might be spread, for instance, to extend 'express' sessions into 'full-range' ones or to provide help with group or specialist services, such as children's story times, job-seekers, reminiscence sessions and so forth.

However, to begin with, pop into the library on some Wednesday afternoon and see how your fellow-members are ensuring the delivery of a vital public service...and then consider volunteering to give them a lift...

Contact: [secretary@harpendsociety.org](mailto:secretary@harpendsociety.org)

# The looming threat of overbuilding

**Richard Thomas, Vice-chairman of The Society and Convenor of the Built Environment Working Group, is also Chairman of the Harpenden Green Belt Association. Here he clearly summarises the current position in respect of the Strategic Local Plan.**

The situation on the Strategic local Plan (SLP) is that every planning authority must have one. That includes St Albans District Council (SADC) of course. They don't have one at present as their attempt to get one through the council failed last November. Without one we are at the mercy of the National Planning Inspectorate who determine all appeals by developers against planning refusals. The NPI report to Eric Pickles and cannot take account of the views of local people or the local authority.

In order to create a new SLP, SADC have decided to call for three reports from independent consultants. They should all have been received by the end of July 2013 but so far only one has been put to the SADC planning committee, and that was incomplete. It is available though on the SADC website.

The three reports cover a review of the green belt boundaries, an assessment of local housing needs and finally a detailed assessment of which parts of the local green belt should be built on. In the first of these the consultants have identified four sites in Harpenden as contributing least to the purposes of the green belt - an arc of land stretching from Whitings Close in Batford round to the Lower Luton Road by Greenacres, the field opposite the Old Bell on the Luton Road, land at the top of Roundwood Lane behind Roundwood School and land at Beeson End Lane. We believe that the methodology used by the consultants for this purpose is bogus. In practice they are saying that if building on the land does not cause coalescence with other towns then it is not contributing to the green belt. On this basis they could have chosen any land round Harpenden, and if SADC accept the methodology then they are opening the door to astounding levels of development in the future around Harpenden as well as elsewhere in the District.

The recently published housing needs assessment proposes that over 11,000 houses should be built in the district between now and 2030 - with Harpenden having a further 2000 units, as well as the 400 already in the pipeline. It paints a gloomy picture for the town's future.

SADC's timetable for their new SLP is that after the three reports have been received and accepted by their planning committee, the planners will finalise the SLP, put it to the full council, go out to public consultation, review it once more at the council, submit it to the NPI who must pronounce it as sound, and then it will become valid. All future planning decisions made by the SADC must comply with their SLP, so it is a very important document.

We are taking this very seriously, and The Society is working together with the Harpenden Green Belt Association to defend against the threat to the town. We are planning a public meeting once the public consultation has started so that residents can be fully informed.



*Above: House building in North Harpenden*

## CRIMEWATCH ADVICE

As usual, the Public Order Working Group offer a few pointers for members to take note of:

- Harpenden North has experienced a disproportionate share of the district's domestic burglaries. Dial 101 should you see/hear anything suspicious.
- If you do witness any robberies, be sure to observe and record as many details as possible. Report any offers of items for sale that you suspect may have been stolen.
- Distraction burglaries - be careful: even something as simple as someone saying his ball has gone into your garden may be a ruse to distract you while an accomplice commits a robbery. 'Operation Manhunt' is the Herts Constabulary project to combat these offences.



# The Harpenden in Question

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

## 12. Art for All's Sake



A year ago one of The Society's public meetings was successfully utilised by way of experiment under the generic title of Leisure Matters. An obliging audience, who appeared to enjoy and certainly became heartily involved in the exercise, were divided into four. Four members of The Society's busy Education and Leisure Working Group then proceeded, carrying their visual aids with them, to circle these mini-groups and held a twenty minute discussion with each.

Rachel Tuckley, well-versed in the arts world and a talented communicator – she was described by one participant in the respondent sheets as 'a wonderful ambassador for the idea' - took the 'arts centre' brief. She asked each of these four sets of attendees this question – **'does Harpenden need an arts centre?'** And the general response was that, although the town has umpteen special associations and clubs for the arts, inclusive of music and singing, there was a call for something along these lines. For all its evident value, there was felt to be some sense of fragmentation and of exclusiveness about the current provision.

**Arts and centre:** first of all, let us define those two terms more clearly. The Society has, with its schools competition, attempted a zestfully wide definition of the creative arts. We were knocked a bit sideways by the response to last year's inaugural venture when we were flooded with over a thousand entries, all in answer to the question, **'Why do I like Harpenden?'**, from eleven of the town's thirteen primary schools. This year the competition is entitled **'Hail Harpendonia'**, with the youngsters asked to imagine that Harpenden is a nation or kingdom in its own right and to design anything from a flag or postage stamps to composing a national anthem. The winning entries will be on view at **Celebration 2014**, for details of which see page four. That event will be preceded by a special ceremony and show for the children, the teachers and the parents.

The categories include the visual arts and crafts, drama, music and dance, photography and IT and creative writing – and that degree of range gives the clue to what might be involved. For the adult market less conventional disciplines such as street theatre and comedy might be considered.. Some members of our leisure workshop wondered whether the sciences might be included. Range of activities is one aspect; the other is out-reach to under-represented groups in the populace, for which disengaged youth might serve as an example. But all those others of a lifelong passivity in respect of these arts must be considered. One of my favourite instances of a positive approach to this, in a thirty-two year experience nationally with the U3A movement, is the Stevenage woman who brilliantly

## The Harpenden Society



2014 Primary Schools Competition

*'Imagine'*

organised an **'I Can't Sing'** choir for older people which went on to do public performances.

Then the word **'centre'**: at first reading indicative of a building. Many at the discussion at last year's **'leisure'** meeting edged towards the view that, yes, a building was required, but it did not need to house all the activities. Some sort of headquarters was essential to convey the right and practical sense of focus but a broad spread of locations could be an advantage. Interestingly, the library service public consultation, referred to on page four, included mention of the library has a **'hub'** for community cultural life. Certainly there was some discussion of the library and its attendant accommodation as such a fulcrum for an arts centre. The other possibility mooted was a refurbished or rebuilt public hall, itself another of the four subjects on offer at the **'leisure'** public meeting and vibrantly run by **Caroline Fleming**, another gifted member of the Education and Leisure Working Group.

**It is a persuasive and attractive idea. Having opened the debate last year, might it be possible this year to assemble a group of interested parties to transform the idea of a Harpenden arts centre into a working proposition?**

**Eric Midwinter**

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

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

Designed by Ron Taylor

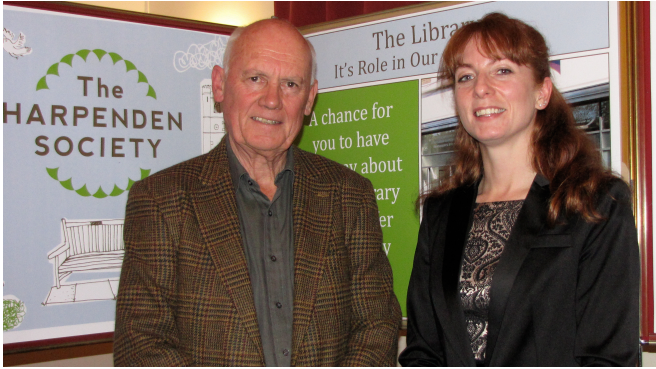
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# Memos to Members

## Can I help you?

By our roving crime correspondent.

Taryn Pearson, Head of Hertfordshire's library service, (below right with Chris Marsden) gave a sparkling presentation to our members at Park Hall on 12 December last. The first public library in Britain was set up in 1598, and Harpenden's new library shows that we have come a long way since then.



Usage of our library has doubled since its move to the High Street, and it does more than lend books – advice on how to use your computer and how to research your family tree are just two of the other services it provides. Ask at the library for more details!

She is thinking ahead to what the library should be doing in ten years time. I hope you filled in the questionnaire that was available on the evening or on line. It was there if you wanted your voice to be heard. Taryn is listening!

Editor's note. This is quite a library-orientated issue, with the news of the library volunteer scheme as our worthy front page story and an honourable mention of the library on page three in 'the Harpenden in Question' editorial, as well as this report on Taryn Preston's presentation at the December public meeting, with mulled wine and mince pies a tasty bonus. Members may like to know that, as a listed stakeholder with the library service, The Society, as well as encouraging everyone to fill in the questionnaire mentioned above by 'Our Roving Reporter', made a written submission on the future of the library service, with especial reference to Harpenden. This may be seen on The Society's website.

## Celebration 2014

### Looking back-Looking forward

You are cordially invited to this occasion at 7.15 p.m.  
Wednesday 26 March  
at Fowden Hall, Rothamsted Research  
when we shall celebrate the year's work in style, hold our brief annual general meeting, enjoy the winning entries in our schools competition and generally have a good time.

## Transports of Few Delights

From Our Reporter Who Would Rove More Were It not For The Transport Problems

Transport: a single word with multiple connotations. With our Chairman, Chris Marsden, in the Freddie Grisewood/David Dimbleby role, an attentive and participant audience kept a panel of half a dozen experts on their toes in a most informative session of not so much 'any' as 'many' questions. The range of posers was surprising. It would appear we need better hospital transport, better parking facilities, better road drainage, better cycle pathways, better parking facilities, better bus services, better train services, oh, and better parking facilities...

The panel responded gallantly: Tom Hennessey and Gary Briggs from the Herts County Council, County Councillor David Williams, Neil Middleton of the Association of Passenger Transport Users, John Copping of Arriva Buses and our very own Donald Robertson, Convenor of The Society's Transport Working Group.



Above from left to right. Members of the panel, Donald Robertson, David Williams, Tom Hennessey, John Copping and Neil Middleton

It was a down-to-earth, shirt sleeves rolled up, workmanlike sort of an evening with panel and people concerned without being rancorous and with some bonny ideas – a pound ticket travelling north by train to Luton to raise passenger usage and revenue; a cycle lane from Kinsbourne Green right through the town; an eastern by-pass from the main road north of Harpenden right round to Junction 9 on the M1 – inventively floated.

**Apologies.** The meeting on planning scheduled for Thursday 27 February had to be postponed, such were the uncertainties of the delayed date of publication of the relevant Strategic Local Plan.

### Note on the increase of subscription from January 1 from 34 Single/£8 Family to £8 and £10

1. members who have not yet increased their subscription, please send balance to treasurer
  2. please cancel old standing orders and complete new ones (form on Society website) and send to treasurer
  3. please note the renewal date is 1 January NOT member's joining date
- Treasurer's address: Harry Downie, 66 Eastmoor Park, Harpenden, Herts, AL5 1BW



# Memos from Members

## Whither the Housing Crisis

Dear Editor,

With reference to your "The countryside is empty" item in the Winter issue: the problem with statistics is that one nearly always needs more information. So as regards you seeing only one person walking in the countryside on a train journey from London to Chester, I would want to know weekday or weekend?, wet or dry?, summer or winter?; and how much of the 'vast and under-utilised wilderness' does one actually see from a train? I say this because other statistics suggest that walking in the countryside is one of the main forms of recreational exercise for the population at large either in organised groups, of which several round here, with friends or, as you saw, with the dog (cf. Nomansland car park most days!). More crucially, we grow only just over half the food we consume and with a burgeoning population, it's not surprising that we now have 'tracts of industrialised agriculture'. In that regard, my own view is that it would be sensible to keep part of the nearby Woodland Trust site in productive agriculture rather than all put down to trees.

For many years, the Harpenden Society had cordial relations with the local branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England, CPRE. We monitored developments in the local built environment, they kept an eye on the Hertfordshire countryside - something in tune with the wishes of many local residents, witness the rapid growth of the local Green Belt Association some years ago. Along with it having sufficient size to support many local activities, it's surely the close proximity of the surrounding 'greenery' that makes Harpenden such an attractive place to live.

As to 'eco-towns', I'll leave that to others but when there was pressure for a mini-town just to the North in the 70s, the Society's membership near doubled overnight! - **John Davis**

**Editor's note:** I heartily welcome John's letter, for my hope is to generate some argument and exchange of views in these columns in respect of my 'The Harpenden in Question' editorial.

*It also gives me the chance to remind readers that, in consequence of governmental neglect over many years, the nation is faced with a catastrophic housing crisis requiring, it is claimed, some 250,000 new-built units annually – the equivalent of twenty Harpendens every year. It is worth noting that in the 30 years to 1981 that target was missed in only one year and in the 30 years after 1981 it has only been achieved once. In 2010 house completions were the lowest since 1923. Yet rather than agreeing and embarking on a national strategy, governments of all colours seem bent on leaving it to local authorities to solve the problem piecemeal, adding at random to existing housing stock, without proper recognition of the infrastructural implications, and by that token nibbling greedily at*

*urban green belt surrounds. That is why it is actually the town, rather than the countryside, that is most at risk and with, accordingly, most people sorely affected..*

*Luckily, some more far-sighted people, un-fazed by the pastoral fallacy, are looking for more imaginative and less destructive solutions. For example, the Charles Woolfson Charitable Trust have offered a £250,000 prize for the best pattern for a 'new towns' equivalent suitable to the needs, aspirations and values of the 21st century. May that prove successful.*

## And then there's the Parking problem

Dear Editor

Further to Eric Midwinter's article "Being car-full", I wonder if the Society is reacting to the Council's latest attempt to provide parking?

The new roadside parking spaces in Leyton Road and Amenbury Lane seem to be a knee jerk reaction to parking problems. Both spaces have the effect of reducing road space and increasing congestion.

The Amenbury spaces are pointless, given that there is a car park a few metres away. The Leyton Road spaces are decidedly dangerous. On a southern approach, I have twice found back up extending to the roundabout near the fire station. When cars are parked, not only do you get a back up of cars in both directions (ironically blocking access to the parking area near the British Legion), but it is not possible to see ahead to see if the road is clear.

I am happy to make the above points to Council as an individual, but a collective response by the Society might carry more weight. - **Alan Marshall**

**Editor's note:** thanks for this – and The Society's Transport Working Group will look at these points. I hope, Alan, you also saw 'Strolling's' piece in the same edition of the newsletter called 'Personal; Parking and Pedestrians'.



Above: The two new parking spaces in Leyton Road

# Heightening the High Street's Impact

## Successful Shopping Initiative for Harpenden Retailers

Christmas 2013 will be remembered by Harpenden Independent retailers as the time they joined the digital age with a page on Facebook to promote their Christmas offers to Harpenden residents. Launch by Town Mayor Rosemary Farmer at the 'Lights On' ceremonies it proved to be a great success for many retailers who enjoyed increased sales. This was reported in the local press when six retailers were photographed with examples of their best selling products.



Above Left to right Keith Lunn, Breathing Space; Fiona Thomas, Oui; Simon Scott, Milehams; Linda Fullwood, Fullwoods. Roger Hannah, Threads and Aarti Parmar,

Continued success followed in the New Year with the launch of a January Sales theme with a new 'address' for the page. [www.facebook.com/HarpendenShopping](http://www.facebook.com/HarpendenShopping). A Spring theme was introduced in February and further themes will be launched throughout 2014 as part of the ongoing 'Thriving High Street' campaign.



**The Society EMAIL APPEAL – WE ARE KEEN TO BE ABLE TO COMMUNICATE READILY WITH MEMBERS BY EMAIL.**

For instance, the chairman writes a periodic letter for all members which we forward in this manner. If you have not already done so, please connect with us via [secretary@harpendensociety.com](mailto:secretary@harpendensociety.com)

**Harpenden Christmas Shopping**  
All You Want For Christmas Here In Harpenden

Merry Christmas  
Sunday Shopping

Independents • Chain stores • Bars, Cafes & Restaurants  
**A High Street alive with Christmas ideas**

**Sunday shopping...Who's open?**  
Full listing at [www.harpenden.gov.uk](http://www.harpenden.gov.uk) / [www.harpendendirectory.co.uk](http://www.harpendendirectory.co.uk)  
[www.harpendensociety.org](http://www.harpendensociety.org) / [www.harpendia.com](http://www.harpendia.com)

Harpenden Christmas Shopping



## Support your local shops

The campaign was masterminded by Ron Taylor, the Society's economic working group head in conjunction with The Town Council, The Harpenden Retail Partnership and Harpenden Directory. The design concepts have been created by Aarti Parmar from AV 82, TV, Hi-fi specialists.

The Harpenden High Street including Southdown continues to have a varied selection of independent retailers and chain stores that offer a wide range of products and services. If we want to keep them we need to use them and not just at Christmas.

## The Harpenden Society AWARDS 2013

**Nominate your favourite new development**

Complete the enclosed form with this Newsletter or go to our web site [www.harpendensociety.org](http://www.harpendensociety.org)

**Hurry, closing date March 14th**