

# **New Town Clerk spells out his aspirations for Harpenden**

At the Harpenden Society's pre-Christmas evening meeting, after some modest seasonal indulgence by way of mince pie and mulled wine consumption, members had their first opportunity to meet the newly-installed Town Clerk. **Carl Cheevers** hastened to assure his audience that he was no stranger to local government in the Harpenden area, having worked for a number of local authorities including, notably, St Albans City & District Council (SADC). Through his career he had gained valuable experience, not least in liaising with central government.

Carl said that, as the Town Council's 'lead officer', he welcomed the opportunity to meet Society members and hoped that they – and the council – could work together for the benefit of the community. He added that the government's Localism Act of 2011 had brought important changes to the Town Council and the Clerk's role, giving more scope for such co-operation. At the same time he recognised the privileged position he held in the affairs of the town, while also stressing his independence in party-political terms.

Budgetary constraints on the Town Council, and on all branches of local government had, he said, become ever tighter. Since 2010, reductions in central government funding had imposed cuts on local authority budgets of about 20%, amounting to some £18 billion. During that time Hertfordshire County Council had had to make savings of £250 million.

## **New Initiatives**

The Town Council was having to work within an overall budget of £1,270,930, of which 73% came from council tax. He said around 16% had to come from what were best described as commercial activities, which had become increasingly important. The money raised enabled the council to generate new initiatives. He pointed out that rental income from users of Park Hall – where he was speaking – of around £50,000 a year was an important contributor.

Other gaps needed to be filled, with Town Council backing, by volunteer groups. Carl cited the five-year management plan for Harpenden Common working closely with the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust.

In that context he mentioned the recent decision to leave unmown margins around the edges of the common – and golf course fairways – to encourage wildlife. That was exemplified by the project to restore



*Above: Carl Cheevers.*

the common's traditional growth of heather (featured in the Harpenden Society's Winter newsletter).

He added that during 2017 the council would be appointing a conservation officer to augment the work of the existing commons and greens officer, to oversee a programme of community involvement and outreach activity.

Another new council initiative had been the Westfield recreation ground play area redevelopment. Well-established volunteer groups such as those at Batford Springs – since 1995, a designated nature reserve – and the Nickey Line, both of whose regular enthusiastic working parties continued their commendable efforts, could rely on Town Council support. That would include help in establishing a new Batford Springs headquarters to replace the rather rundown old Upper Lea Valley Group building in Lower Luton Road.

Looking to the future, Carl said he hoped that, over say the next three-year time span, the Town Council would build on its already recognised successes. He said his vision for Harpenden's future would necessarily have to take into account the need for its plans to meet the parameters of the much-vaunted **Neighbourhood Plan** within the framework of SADC's District Local Plan.

**He spoke of his goal of making Harpenden a showcase to which other town and parish authorities might aspire. To that end he expected the council and businesses to work together to create 'a vibrant High Street', not forgetting Station Road and Leyton Road shopping areas. Meanwhile the council would do all it could to ensure the much-needed Health and Wellness Centre planned for the 'Red House' site in Carlton Road came to fruition."**



# Marquis Meadow expands Batford Springs reserve



Rural enjoyment for leisure walkers through the five-acre meadow bounded by the River Lea and that part of Marquis Lane down-river from the Crabtree Lane ford has been enhanced with the recent opening of a surfaced path running roughly parallel with a 500 yard stretch of the river bank. Newly-installed stout timber kissing gates, at Crabtree Lane and at the other end of the path near the old railway bridge and Piggottshill Lane water treatment plant, allow ready access for pedestrians.

The newly-designated ‘Marquis Meadow’, bought two years ago by Harpenden Town Council, augments the nearby – upstream – Batford Springs local nature reserve, effectively increasing the total area of the reserve by some 50%.

Running close to the bank of the river – a relatively rare chalk stream, nowadays supporting a variety of aquatic life – the new path also offers a more pastoral alternative line for walkers and bikers following the Lea Valley Walk, along the former GNR railway track between Batford and Wheathampstead.



Chairman of the town council’s environment committee Brian Ellis has commended the hard work on the Marquis Meadow project undertaken by local Batford Springs volunteers (formerly the Upper Lea Valley Group). Their efforts have been supported by a Rights of Way improvement grant from Herts County Council.

Interpretation panels and benches are due to be installed in the future and during the course of this year the town council plans to organise a series of events and activities in conjunction with the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, for people to learn more about the wildlife in and around Batford Springs and Marquis Meadow.



# AWARDS 2016-Final Call

We need your help in identifying the best of the new in Harpenden so that we can recognise what is worthy of an award. Please let us know of any new building developments or facilities completed in 2016 that you believe are worthy of our recognition. The premier award is a Plaque for outstanding projects. Other projects may be given a Certificate of Merit or a Letter of Commendation.

In 2015 the winner was the Glen Eagle Manor Development by Jarvis Homes.



**Please complete either or both these sections below by March 31st 2017:**

**I wish to nominate the following for the 2016 Harpenden Society Plaque:**

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**I wish to nominate the following for a 2016 Harpenden Society Certificate of Merit or Letter of Commendation**

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**Please use this space for any comments**

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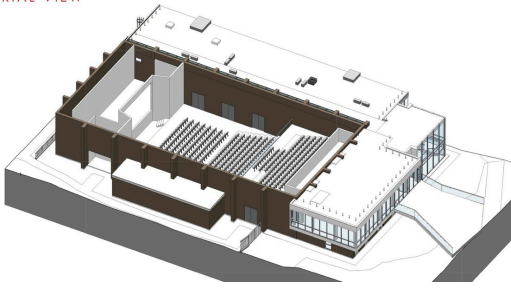
**Please email to 'awards@harpendensociety.org' or post to: Penny Ayres, Kinsbourne House, Kinsbourne Green, Harpenden AL5 3PE.**

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

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

# Harpenden's new Arts & Leisure centres

ARTS AND CULTURAL CENTRE  
AERIAL VIEW



LEISURE CENTRE  
PEDESTRIAN VIEW



## Leisure centre plans – an opposing view

SIR, - My wife and I must protest at the Harpenden Society's ongoing support for the proposed developments in our town centre and Rothamsted Park. The Society must be all too aware that our town centre is clogged with traffic for some twelve hours a day.

Yet you appear to be giving full support to the St Albans District Council proposals for 1) An 'arts and leisure centre' in Rothamsted Park, 2) An 'enabling development' on the site of the Public Halls. (I assume that this can be translated as 'luxury apartments'.) and 3) The possibility/likelihood of a multi-storey car park in Amenbury Lane.

We read in the Society's Winter newsletter that 'in a Harpenden Society initiative, Westminster Lodge and Batchwood leisure centres were visited as an indication of what might be accomplished in Rothamsted Park'. May I point out that both Westminster Lodge and Batchwood leisure centres are not in the centre of St Albans. They are on the outskirts of the city.

Comparable facilities may well be needed in Harpenden. But to suggest that this should be done in Rothamsted Park, in the centre of our town, is quite lunatic.

It shows a total disregard for town centre residents. Your newsletter bemoans the lack of parking in the town and yet you appear to be backing a proposal that will greatly increase the amount of traffic! Would it not be much more sensible to build any new facility on an edge-of-town site, drawing traffic out of, as opposed to into, the town centre.

As Harpenden town centre residents for some thirty five years, we find it sad and disappointing, that we should – in your newsletter editor's words – 'have to resign ourselves to more ugly intrusions on the townscape...' like the footbridge at our railway station.

Regarding ever more town centre development, we should say 'enough is enough'. The evident views of the Harpenden Society, and of our SADC and town councillors, on the Rothamsted Park sports and leisure centre proposals, seem aimed to ensure that we pass on to our children and grandchildren a much less attractive town.

Yours, Victor Lowry. Amenbury Lane

## Chris Marsden, Harpenden Society chairman, replies:

As a Society, we do our best to support efforts which we feel will add to the amenity and quality of life in the town, while opposing those things likely to have an adverse effect. We have to make these decisions on the basis of what we feel is best for the people of Harpenden. As a civic society it is our function to try to work for all the town's residents, not just our members.

In the case of the planned redevelopment of the swimming pool and sports centre to create a new, modern sports, arts and leisure facility, we are clear that the proposals are in the interests of the town as a whole. We held two lively public meetings – fully reported in our Winter newsletter – at which leaders of sports and leisure organisations in Harpenden were invited to tell us about their activities and their future facility aspirations.

The proposals met with near universal approval from those groups. I take your point that Westminster Lodge and Batchwood are sited further away from St Albans' urban centre than the envisaged Rothamsted Park development is from Harpenden town centre. And we recognise there are many issues still to be determined, and these include the connection between the new centre and the town and, in particular, related parking issues.

Parking and traffic congestion are, of course, huge problems in Harpenden and different options are being studied. We don't believe, however, that these problems are sufficient to outweigh the benefits the proposed centre will bring over say the next thirty years. And we wonder if we will, by then, still be driving cars as we presently know them. However, it's unlikely that sports, arts and leisure activity will have declined.

Regarding the Public Halls, no decisions have yet been made, though we are assured by SADC leader Cllr Julian Daly that they will remain in use until the new arts and cultural 'hub' (in the shell of the present sports centre building) is opened – that is by December 2019 at the earliest. Only then, will the future of the Public Halls site be a matter for public consultation. Though the eventual sale of the site for residential use must remain a possibility, Cllr Daly stresses it is not a determining factor in the financial plan for the new centre.



# Addressing Harpenden's transport challenges

It became abundantly clear, at a packed Harpenden Society meeting in January, that transport and related issues, notably car parking, loom large in local concerns. After hearing five guest speakers give their – at times controversial – views on ‘Shaping the way we travel....to help relieve congestion’ – members of the 80-strong audience were eager to join in what proved to be a lively debate.



**Phil Waters**, (above) the society's chairman designate, whose own professional experience covers several transport matters, including the founding of the Hatfield-based UNO local bus service, set the scene for a fruitful exchange of opinions.

He said Harpenden's attractions as a town were apparent to everyone. But they had to be set against its many transport-related challenges, many of which arose from above-average car ownership...and usage. In consequence, cross-county bus services serving Harpenden were not well used, parking problems were getting worse, and air quality measurements showed high levels of pollution, notably in the High Street, Station Road and Southdown Road.

Surveys conducted for the county's Hertfordshire Transport Vision 2050 report had shown, surprisingly, that only 49% of journeys in Harpenden were made by car. Nevertheless, road capacity was 'at its limits', while traffic forecasts indicated a further 15% surge in the number of road trips by 2031. That would bring worsening congestion which, said Mr Waters, was predicted to result in a 25% increase in journey times.

He added that thanks to current constraints on the public purse there was no funding available today for new roads. Hertfordshire County Council's budget for roads had in fact been cut by 14% over the last six years.

It had to be faced, he said, that the average age of Harpenden's population was getting older, which meant a rising need for public transport, though most existing bus services ran through the town, typically between St Albans and Luton. They were therefore of limited benefit to those living away from the main bus routes.

Mr Waters pointed out that in any case the reliability of bus service timings was often disrupted nowadays by intense volumes of traffic. He described congestion as a 'cancer' plaguing many bus services in towns. But he foresaw ways that congestion could be eased, especially if car drivers had a convenient option of bus travel. Parents should accordingly be deterred wherever possible from 'school run' car use; and cycling should be made safer and more attractive for children getting to and from school.

He welcomed the new Harpenden Hopper community bus initiative, expressing the hope that the service would thrive

and possibly be expanded to include services linking Redbourn and Wheathampstead to Harpenden. Proof of the need for 'Hopper style' services was clear from findings that 63% of car journeys were under 5 miles, and many of them under one mile.

Andy Buchanan, (below) the driving force behind the Hopper bus venture, then spoke of the many administrative and technical challenges involved in planning the service, which was scheduled to begin operations on February 15. He said the potential for such a service became apparent to him and his partner in the venture Simon George, in conversations they had had with local churches and the Harpenden Trust, which had shown the isolation of many elderly and disabled members of the community living on the outskirts of the town.



A questionnaire circulated to 13,000 Harpenden households brought almost 300 positive responses, showing there was a definite need for a local public transport service. Many people who responded, said Mr Buchanan, were car owners. But they recognised that, as they got older, they would have to give up driving and a convenient bus service would make that decision easier.

Beginning as a three-days-a-week operation the 15-seat Hopper minibus service would initially run from Kinsbourne Green car park to Church Green, following the route detailed on page 12 of our Winter newsletter. It would run from 9.30am to 4.30pm. There would be specific pick-up points, but the bus could be hailed anywhere along the route.

In the interests of environmental friendliness, it was hoped that in the future, if the service proved as popular as everyone hoped, quiet and pollution-free electric buses could be acquired. **In the meantime, said Mr Buchanan, he was continuing to appeal for more volunteer drivers.**





The next speaker was Brian Deegan, (below) a traffic engineer specialising in road layout and design, who spoke of the challenges he faced when working for Transport for London (TfL), and their relevance in tackling many of the issues now arising in the Harpenden area. Bureaucratic inertia dogged too many initiatives in tackling transport problems, he said. But health and safety were issues which nowadays often forced local authorities into action.



Everyone agreed with the basic tenet that cycling should be encouraged. It provided healthy exercise and was pollution free, though there was admittedly a safety issue where bikes had to share road space with cars, lorries and buses. But Mr Deegan contended that, despite media publicity drawn by accidents to cyclists, TfL statistics showed that, even in London, the risks were infinitesimal.

Cycling and walking were, in many cases, viable alternatives to driving, in and around a town the size of Harpenden. In Mr Deegan's judgment, a reasonably fit person could walk from one side of the town to the other in 20 minutes or, in the same length of time, they could cycle from Wheathampstead to Redbourn.

What makes a street healthy and welcoming, was a rhetorical question Mr Deegan endeavoured to answer. It should be easy to cross, have seats where pedestrians can relax and feel safe, with clean air and a low noise level allowing people to talk without shouting.

He criticised many of the footways (pavements) in Harpenden's busy minor roads, such as Roundwood Lane and Carlton Road, for being too narrow for safety; a width of 4ft 7in (1.4m) should be the minimum. Also on safety grounds, pedestrianisation of some or all of Lower High Street – previously proposed and rejected – should perhaps be considered again.



John Talbot, (above) from the town's car park study group set up in 2014, representing residents' and business interests in the town, said it was vital for the parking issue to be an integral element of the forthcoming Neighbourhood Plan. The problems needed to be better understood, leading to a 'joined up' plan rather than a piecemeal approach –

exemplified by proposals a year or so ago for kerbside restrictions in the Avenues area.

A full survey was needed, said Mr Talbot, to establish a percentage breakdown of where Harpenden's all-day kerbside parkers came from. It was recognised that a substantial number were London commuters who drove in each weekday morning from Wheathampstead, Redbourn or the smaller outlying villages. There was also anecdotal evidence that people from distant parts of the country, flying off on holiday from Luton Airport, parked their cars in Harpenden streets for weeks at a time, incurring only the cost of taxi rides to and from the airport.

There were, he added, inevitable obstacles, principally one of cost, to be addressed in any proposals to ease Harpenden's parking problems. Underground car parks were perhaps the most visually attractive solution, though recent estimates pointed to a cost of around £30,000 per car space. That prompted county councillor Teresa Heritage to emphasise the present constraints on the public purse in attempts to ease Harpenden's acute transport and parking issues.

From the floor of the meeting, resident Rob Pearman made a plea, on the grounds of pedestrian and child safety, for lower speed limits to be imposed on more streets in Harpenden, particularly where parked cars on both sides make them effectively single-lane thoroughfares.

He cited Tennyson Road as an example, on the grounds of pedestrian and child safety, where a 20mph speed restriction was needed. But county councillor David Williams pointed out that the police were not empowered to enforce lower local speed limits. However, there was general agreement from those attending the meeting that the alternative of adding more 'speed humps' in residential roads should be resisted.

Meanwhile a number of those in the audience called for local campaigns aimed at encouraging people to walk or cycle, in the interests of health and fitness, while combatting Harpenden's seemingly ingrained 'car culture'. Joanne Wicks said youngsters should be encouraged to take up cycling as a sport and that designated cycle routes were needed 'where people want and need to go'. A more specific suggestion from the floor was that a truly safe 'off road' cycle lane between Harpenden and Southdown could be provided along the edge of the common, parallel with Southdown Road.

What about a London-style 'congestion charge' to be imposed on drivers wanting to come into the town centre, asked Ron Taylor. It would encourage informal car sharing or the formation of more formal 'car user clubs', possibly linked to community groups. Cllr David Williams (below) said the proposal could, perhaps in 10 or 15 years time, when the technology had been refined, be integrated into a road charging scheme.



# Did You Know?

## From Harpenden's history

### Royal British Legion's heritage

**One of the oldest buildings facing Harpenden Common is Bennets – variously spelled Bennetts, with or without an apostrophe. It has been headquarters since 1959 of the town's branch of the then British Legion – twelve years before the organisation's 'Royal' status was conferred. The recent extensive rebuilding work at the rear and, more particularly, the refurbishment of its forecourt and façade have helped draw attention to what is a historic edifice.**

It is thought to have been built as a substantial family house some time in the 17th Century, as a two-storey timber-framed structure, the walls filled with wattle and daub, a popular method of construction at the time. But during the following two centuries, Bennets underwent considerable structural changes. In the 1700s, a lean-to extension was added, in 'Flemish bond' brickwork, probably to form a scullery.

There were further single-storey extensions at the rear, of little architectural merit, built in the mid-20th Century, which have been replaced as part of the recent upgrade of the building.

Bennets' earliest occupants have yet to be identified. But records show that a local curate, the Rev George Barnard, leased the house from about 1715 to 1745, setting up a school for 'the instruction of the sons of neighbours in his house'. The educational standard attained must have been high, because one of the pupils, the Rev Barnard's own son, went on to become headmaster and provost of Eton College.

Connections with the Rothamsted Estate were established in 1785, when Bennets was bought by Thomas Lawes, who had married one Mary Bennet, whose brother John Bennet had inherited Rothamsted from his first cousin Thomas Witterwonge – who had died, aged only 40, in 1763. As far as can be determined, the house and the occupying family having the same name is coincidental.

Thomas and Mary's son, John Bennet Lawes, subsequently inherited the estate in 1801. He added a stable block on the north side of Bennets. It provided accommodation for the Prince Regent's horses when he visited, notably to take part in the local hunt. Today the buildings house Lussmanns restaurant.

In 1843, John Bennet Lawes' son (who shared his name) established Rothamsted's now world-renowned agricultural research operation. Ownership of Bennets passed to the younger John's sister Marianne who, in 1847 – by then divorced – came to live in the house with her five children, until her death in 1891. In his 'Cottage Life in a Hertfordshire Village' Edwin Grey observed that 'it was owing to this lady's influence and help that many a cottage boy or girl from this part of the parish was given a good start on the road to a successful career'.

**After her death, Bennets was let to various tenants. For a time in 1915 it was a convalescent home – possibly for First World War casualties. One Victor Tylston Hodgson lived there during the 1920s. He was a notable contributor of archives and artefacts to the then Harpenden Urban District Council (disbanded in 1974) for establishing a 'future Harpenden Museum' – an aspiration yet to be fulfilled in 2017, though with positive steps towards that goal now being advanced in the proposals for a new Arts and Leisure Hub, some 200 yards from Bennets in Rothamsted Park.**



**Acknowledgement: the website of Harpenden Local History Society**



# EDITOR'S VIEW

Alan Bunting

## Southdown threatened by wrong kind of dispensing

Residents of south Harpenden are rightly outraged at the government wanting to dispense with their local chemist's. Over a thousand of them have expressed their anger in petitions addressed to Harpenden MP Peter Lilley.

Under financial cutbacks being imposed across the country by NHS England, Manor Pharmacy at Southdown is having its government support – that subsidises prescription costs – in the financial year ending March 2017, reduced by 16%; a further 8% reduction is scheduled for the following year. Although the business currently returns a small profit, explains Manor Pharmacy group managing director Graham Phillips, around 90% of that margin is NHS dependent.

The ruling, which Graham says 'came out of the blue' last year, targets all those independent pharmacies located less than a mile from an alternative dispensing chemist. And because the Southdown pharmacy is ruled to be only nine-tenths of a mile from the nearest alternative – Topkins in Station Road – it is not protected from the ruling and in consequence faces the axe.

Graham describes the legislation as 'bad policy and bad politics' while severely harming the local community. Many of his Southdown customers are elderly and/or disabled and rely on their local pharmacy being within comfortable walking or wheelchair distance. Others face the prospect of waiting for a bus or getting out the car to drive into Harpenden town centre with its attendant traffic congestion and parking problems.

BBC TV coverage of the issue has helped draw public attention to the

threat facing local residents, and Harpenden Society members are urged to support the Southdown Manor Pharmacy protest by signing a petition form in the shop, or by lobbying Peter Lilley or NHS England direct.

If only the extra £100 million a week for the NHS promised by Brexiteers if we left the EU had proved more than a pipe dream, the threat to Southdown's highly-valued pharmacy would likely not have arisen. But hard reality has prevailed and everyone in Harpenden must wish Manor Pharmacy and its many customers success in their crusade.



Above: Manor Pharmacy, Southdown.

Below: Graham Phillips addressing the supporters of the Southdown Pharmacy.





# Harpenden's youth generation give their view on: The 3G all weather pitch at Roundwood Park School.



Above: The planned location for the 3G pitch on Roundwood Park playing fields.

**Ian Holden (Chairman, Harpenden Colts FC) writes:** Roundwood Park School's new astro artificial turf pitch is an important development for **Harpenden Colts Football Club**. At present we have no control over the facilities we use for mid-week training. Until last summer, Venue 360 in Luton – 5½ miles from Harpenden – was our closest facility for mid-week training. That venue was shut without notice, highlighting the vulnerability of the club's options.

Having somewhere with assured availability at **Roundwood Park** will allow long-term planning, without the uncertainty of access – and cost – that has hung over us in recent times. This is important, particularly given the encouraging growth in our girls section, which has launched five new squads in the last 18 months.

The new facility will also reduce the distance having to be travelled by coaches, players and parents, where currently the nearest available venues are Ashcroft School, Luton (7 miles), Beaumont School, St Albans (7 miles) and the Hertfordshire Sport Village, Hatfield (9 miles). All of these venues involve significant travel time and cost for coaches and parents.

Also, crucially, the astro pitch will enable the Colts club to provide coaching in a more structured way. Having all our squads training at the same venue will allow us to bring in external coaches to assist in improving the development of players, managers and coaches in a shared coaching environment.

**Gaby Holt (A pupil at Roundwood Park School) writes:** Matthew Hunter, head of the PE department at Roundwood Park School, was asked for his views on



Above: 'Roundwood Park Year 7 Football Team'

the 3G pitch and the way that it is likely to affect school life. The pitch's primary function is to be used for football, though Mr Hunter said the school also intended to use it for as many sports as possible, including Rugby training, athletics, fitness and other physical activities.

There are limitations however on what can be played on the pitch. For example, hockey is not possible as the grass length affects play and Mr Hunter agreed that 'quality would differ' between sports for which the pitch was not primarily intended.

Perhaps most obviously and importantly, the pitch would provide the school with somewhere to play sports in bad weather. Currently too many fixtures had sadly to be cancelled when rain or snow had made the school's conventional sports pitches unplayable. Mr Hunter pointed out that PE lessons would also benefit.

As well as benefitting the school's own school sports activity, it is good to know that, outside school hours, Harpenden Colts FC will have a more consistent pitch which they can rely on in all weathers on which to train and play. Indeed the school hopes the new astro pitch will benefit the whole of the community, most especially the young people of Harpenden and the surrounding area.

Mr Hunter said he also wanted to express his gratitude to the Football Association and to Harpenden Colts for their funding contributions towards the new pitch, as well as their support through the planning stages.

## SOCIETY MEETING DATES

30th March at Park Hall. 7.30pm  
The Neighbourhood Plan

20th April at Park Hall 7.30pm  
A short AGM followed by Simon Linnett,  
Chairman of the Governors,  
L&D Hospital, speaking on the subject of  
"Funding issues in the NHS"

Please send comments on this article or any other issues raised in this edition to the editor: Alan Bunting  
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Visit the Society's website –  
[www.harpendensociety.org](http://www.harpendensociety.org)

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