

# New Health Centre plans moving forward

Outline plans for the proposed Health and Wellbeing Centre on the 'Red House' site in Carlton Road were revealed in our last (Winter 2017) newsletter. A subsequent progress report from Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust was given by representatives from the Trust at a meeting of interested parties in early January.

The project is moving in a positive direction. A revised business plan has been created and submitted to Herts Valleys Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), the NHS commissioner for services in the area. The CCG is due to consider the plan at its board meeting in March.

More importantly, Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust will submit a planning application to St Albans District Council in May, following positive discussions that have already taken place with planning officers. The application will include a proposal for housing on the site, including the conversion of the Red House itself into apartments. It was re-emphasised that 'site conservation' had been a priority, albeit with selected removal of trees and planting of new trees and shrubs.

Perhaps, inevitably, the original timetable for the new centre's completion has been revised. The intention is for construction of the healthcare facilities to start in mid-2019 with the aim of completing the work in late 2020. Meanwhile, Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust plans to run a local public awareness campaign, drawing attention to the benefits of the centre, where more health issues which currently involve hospital visits to the L&D, St Albans, Hemel Hempstead or even Watford, can be dealt with locally.

It is hoped and expected that media and other publicity, not least in this Harpenden Society newsletter, will encourage local people and organisations to give their support to the plans when they are submitted to St Albans District Council for public comment. **THS**

**The Harpenden Society and Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust invite you to find out more about plans for a NEW Health & Wellbeing centre in Harpenden**



Artist's impression of the proposed new Health and Wellbeing Centre

**Plans will be submitted to St Albans District Council in May**  
**Your active support can help us achieve a successful planning application**

**Public Meeting**  
inc a brief Society AGM  
**7.30 pm for 8.00 pm Start**  
**Thursday April 19**  
**Rothamsted**  
**Conference Centre**  
**Harpenden**  
**Free parking**

MEETING ORGANISED BY



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



**FREE entry by ticket only** [www.harpendensociety.org](http://www.harpendensociety.org)  
**Book via the Society web site**



The current entrance to the 'Red House' site on Carlton Rd where the new Health and Wellbeing centre is proposed.

# 80 years on – a look back at the Public Halls



Among older Harpenden residents especially, the prospect of a new leisure complex in Rothamsted Park effectively replacing the familiar Public Halls on the other side of the common is regarded with mixed feelings. By 21st Century standards, the Public Halls might lack the features and refinements of many comparable civic theatres and meeting venues in other provincial towns. As an auditorium for staged events, the large Eric Morecambe hall's seating arrangements leave a lot to be desired, while backstage facilities are poor. So too are the acoustics and the building's heating is antiquated.

Nevertheless, the Public Halls remain functional, in the best sense of that word and it is doubtful whether many people stay away from staged performances, exhibitions or other events because of the building's physical shortcomings. This year marks the 80th anniversary of the venue's grand opening and through their lifetime the Public Halls have served the town well, not least perhaps because of their prominent position, to everyone coming into the town along St Albans Road.

How the Public Halls came into being eighty years ago was the subject of a presentation at the Harpenden Society's well-attended December meeting. The guest speakers were Rosemary and Gavin Ross from the town's thriving local history society, whose extensive archives contain a wealth of information on the prolonged local civic machinations leading up to the Halls' opening in 1938.



***Public Halls foundation stone, laid in September 1938 and now largely obscured by the later entrance***

Rosemary began by reminding her Park Hall audience that they were sitting in what was previously the village's Public Hall. As early as 1919, on the occasion of the war memorial dedication on Church Green, ideas for an all-new facility were put forward. It was among a package of tentative proposals which envisaged, in a comprehensive single development, 'a hall suitable for public meetings and entertainments of every kind, including dancing; smaller meeting rooms for refreshments, games eg billiards; offices for Harpenden Urban District Council (HUDC); a library; and a creche'.

Outside the propounded civic centre, on the adjacent area of common, would be 'a covered swimming pool

and properly-equipped playing grounds for cricket and tennis, as well as a bowling green and a public golf course, run by the council, at very nominal charges'.

In 1931, HUDC purchased the 16th/17th Century Harpenden Hall, proceeding in 1932 to furnish part of it as council offices, but with the added provision of an assembly room available for meetings – but 'excluding music, cinematic shows, dances etc', and where a strict no-smoking decree was enforced.

By 1933, fresh agitation had begun on the need for an all-new Public Hall complex and in October 1934 came the first mention of such a project in HUDC records, mentioning 'a sub-committee appointed to consider and report on a draft scheme prepared by the Surveyor'. The following month, at what was deemed to be 'a propitious time' of stability and low interest rates, a decision was made to proceed with the scheme in the gardens of Harpenden Hall. At a preliminary estimated cost of £12,000, it provided for the erection of a main hall seating 500, capable of extension to seat 650, plus a stage and dressing rooms, together with a smaller hall, cloakrooms and kitchen.

The Royal Institute of British Architects was consulted about staging an open competition for the best design for the site. It was won by Messrs Yeats and Bull of Welwyn Garden City. Thomas Bull and Reginald Yeats were each awarded £500, the prize money outlay said to have been less than the cost of a more commercial estimate.

As an aside, Ms Ross said that following Mr Bull's death in 1975, his wife came across the architect's plans for Harpenden Public Halls, which proved helpful in identifying the position of pipes and cables which had lately been giving problems.

Formal adoption of the scheme by HUDC was then sought. Earlier requests by the Post Office to acquire some of the site – then part of Harpenden Hall's large gardens – were overcome.



***Rosemary Ross***



In May 1936, in the light of numerous comments from interested parties, amended plans were submitted. They included a revised main elevation (frontage), a 'more commodious' main hall and improved stage and dressing room area.

In December 1936 the architects were instructed to proceed with preparing working drawings and a detailed specification, enabling HUDC to invite tenders for construction. By July 1937 the council had agreed to 'seal the contract', even though the cost had risen by 75% from the 1934 estimate of £12,000 to £21,000. The main contractor was to be Richard Ginn & Sons of Hertford.

The decision to go ahead was not unanimous however. Councillors Gingell and Freeman were dissenters, supported by numerous objectors who, then as now, expressed their strident views through letters to the Herts Advertiser. A Mr C A Watson attacked the council's need for a significant loan. He was supported by a Mr E Hasseldine of what was then the Harpenden Preservation Society, pointing out the resulting 'burden on the rates', and suggesting the scheme might divert funds away from appeals to pay for the Nursing Centre at 40 Luton Road.

Mr Hasseldine referred scornfully to the expenditure of 'over £20,000 on a building mainly for play acting'. He urged fellow ratepayers to lobby the council with their objections, adding that 'if they are too lethargic to take any action, they cannot complain if the rates go up and up and up'. To drive home his argument he penned a cartoon depicting the supposed 'nightmare'.

Building nevertheless went ahead. In February 1938 an HUDC sub-committee approved a coat of arms panel cut from Portland stone 'at a cost not exceeding £33' as well as minor changes to the boundary walls.

Despite the building then nearing completion, in late April 1938 the Herts Ad correspondent Mr Hasseldine was back on his high horse, complaining of 'the vandalism of the beauties of Harpenden', especially the siting of the 'ultra-modern building' – an 'outrageous white elephant' – close to and between the historic structures of Harpenden Hall and possibly the village's oldest domestic residence at 2 Southdown Road.

Meanwhile preparations for the official opening of the 'New Harpenden Public Halls' at the end of September went ahead. The previous week's Herts Advertiser carried a detailed description of the development, its reporter admitting that 'the exterior of the building has not met with general approval, on the ground that the modernity of the design and the colour of the bricks do not blend with the surroundings'. Though it is averred, somewhat limply, that 'one should not judge things on their face value', as it went on to describe the well-appointed interior.

At the opening ceremony, HUDC chairman Cllr Ronald Taylor started by asking those present to join in singing 'O God Our Help In Ages Past' in view of the dark days the country was going through. The event coincided with Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain returning from his Munich meeting with Hitler. Cllr Taylor's assertion of 'Peace in our time' became the theme of a united thanksgiving service held in the new halls on Sunday October 9.

**The opening of the Public Halls was front page news for the Harpenden Free Press.**



**AWARDS 2017-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 2017 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 2016 the winner was Shanly Homes for the apartment block in Southdown-Stonehurst Court.



Please complete either or both these sections below by **March 31st 2018**:

I wish to nominate the following for the 2017 Harpenden Society Plaque:

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I wish to nominate the following for a 2017 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.

# Creating an educational focus

A welcome new face on The Harpenden Society committee is that of Chris Armitage, whose watching brief is to head up our Education Working Group, at a time of exciting new school developments in the town, especially the imminent addition of a fourth secondary school, on the Common Lane site at Batford.



**Chris Armitage**

As indicated in our Winter 2017 newsletter, Katherine Warington School (KWS) is expected to further consolidate the enviably high reputation enjoyed by Harpenden's existing secondary schools – St George's, Roundwood Park and Sir John Lawes – as educational centres of excellence.

Chris Armitage, as a school governor and member of the Harpenden Secondary Schools Committee, says the collaborative involvement of the existing schools, along with representatives from Rothamsted Research, bodes well for the future success of KWS in maintaining the same high standards in both academic and extramural activities.

It is hoped, says Chris, that that collaboration will yield benefits in a wider context, especially that of Harpenden's future as a community, a subject now being actively debated by all those concerned in formulating the town council's Neighbourhood Plan.

Nowhere is that arguably more pertinent than in matters which in Oxford or Cambridge would traditionally be discussed under the heading of 'town and gown', and which, in 21st Century Harpenden, are apt to focus on the mundane but crucial issue of traffic congestion around schools at morning start and afternoon departure times.

It is something which, as Chris points out, is not always readily apparent to school staff; teachers normally get to school half an hour or more before their pupils and leave correspondingly later, so might not observe the traffic mayhem first hand. Deterring parents from bringing their older children to school by car with resulting twice-a-day traffic chaos is an immense challenge to which, he admits, there is no obvious solution. **THS**

**Chris Armitage, a Yorkshireman by birth, was a teacher all his working life until his 'nominal' retirement from full-time teaching, latterly as assistant head of Sir John Lawes school, five years ago. It is a profession which runs in his family; his wife, son and daughter all earning their living 'in the classroom'.**

**He came to Harpenden in 1975, joining the staff at what was then Manland Secondary School, as a PE and English teacher. He concedes that back then it was a relatively low-achieving comprehensive, but that in recent years it has progressed to more than hold its own with the town's other secondary schools.**

**Chris emphasises the job satisfaction he has derived from teaching, particularly in watching often fairly guileless 11-year olds develop, over five or six years, into fully-rounded and educationally well-qualified members of society.**

**It is, he says, a tough but very rewarding job, but with the many rewards having to be earned, not least through the need to establish an ethos of mutual respect between teacher and youngster. He maintains that all children, from all social backgrounds, want to learn – something on which a good teacher can build, albeit sometimes involving 'risks', which serve to add spice to the challenges.**

**That, in its turn, says Chris, is reflected in students' behaviour. He pays credit to Harpenden's junior schools whose pupils, having reached the age of 11 or so, almost invariably show themselves eager to pursue their studies when they embark on their secondary education.**



# Clearing the air

Those attending the Harpenden Society's February meeting might well have described it as a 'breath of fresh air'. It certainly created a temporary distraction from our pervasive pre-occupation with the St Albans District Local Plan and Harpenden's own Neighbourhood Plan.

More appositely, the presentation was all about the degree of freshness of the air we breathe. The guest speaker Professor Ranjeet Sokhi is director of the University of Hertfordshire's Centre for Atmospheric Research at Hatfield. The rhetorical title of his talk, 'Air Pollution – How Fresh is our Fresh Air' served to highlight the growing concerns throughout the world, especially in urban areas, about poor air quality and its inevitably harmful effects, most obviously on human health.



*Ranjeet Sokhi*

He was keen to emphasise that contamination of the air in a particular location such as Harpenden High Street could not be blamed wholly on pollutants emitted from vehicle exhausts or smoking chimneys in the immediate area. Satellite observations had shown that concentrations of pollution could be moved vast distances across the globe, often affected by climate interactions.



*Road traffic just one pollution source*

Instrumentation, including for example the use of lasers, for measuring pollutants, especially the tiny particles capable of penetration deep into the lungs, was continuing to advance. It provided an ever greater understanding of cause and effect, when set against available health statistics.

A World Health Organisation report in 2014 concluded that 'air pollution is the world's largest single environmental health risk' and it was estimated that seven million, or one in eight, premature deaths were attributable to air pollution. Meanwhile the numerous non-fatal effects included increased stroke, heart disease and respiratory disease problems. In the UK, according to the Department for Food, Environment and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), polluted air shortened average life expectancy by about six months, the associated financial costs of which were estimated at some £16 billion.

Particular mention was made by Ranjeet of the pollutants associated with diesel exhaust, namely nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) and particulate matter (PM), though he acknowledged, during the meeting's subsequent Q&A session, that today's car and truck diesels, compliant with legislated 'Euro 6' emission standards, were among the 'cleanest' of road vehicle engines. He added however 'that there is no threshold below which health effects do not occur'.



*Exhaust emission laws being tightened*

Agreed EU atmospheric quality standards were already in place in the UK, based on limits for PM, NO<sub>2</sub> and Ozone (O<sub>3</sub>) per cubic metre of air, with a further limit for ultra-fine particles due for implementation in 2020. But, said Ranjeet, in reality they were targets rather than enforceable limits. The NO<sub>2</sub> standard in particular was regularly exceeded in many places, especially in towns and cities, where it exacerbated breathing problems, most seriously for asthmatics.

On a relatively positive note for Harpenden residents, although there were no monitoring points in the town, measurements taken across the county, including St Albans, showed a typical 'low' pollution level. On the day of the Harpenden Society meeting, a level 2 pollution – on a scale of 1 to 10 – was measured in towns within about a 10 mile radius.

*Article continues on next page*

In contrast, a maximum level 10 had been recorded in the traffic-choked streets of Camden, north London, on a day in February. It had been shown however that around two-thirds of London's airborne pollution originated elsewhere, and was then carried in by climatic activity, most obviously wind.

Monitoring of average air quality in the St Albans area over the past seven years had shown a downward trend in NO2 concentrations. Ranjeet pointed out however that it was greatly influenced by the weather. Rain cleaned the air, while cold dry conditions allowed pollutants to remain airborne.

Tests undertaken by the University of Hertfordshire team in the tunnel underneath the Galleria at Hatfield had shown that fewer airborne particles came from vehicle exhausts than was often supposed – only about a third. The remainder came from road surface and brake wear detritus and 'resuspended' matter, thrown-up by vehicle movement turbulence.

One conclusion drawn from those results was that adoption of electric cars in place of diesel or petrol would not reduce real-life PM levels in the air very significantly. Another conclusion from the team's researches was that ultra-fine particle concentrations in the air were heavily affected by the distance of the site from a road travelled by motor vehicles and of course the density of traffic along that road.

Global warming, although a largely separate issue from air quality, was touched on in Ranjeet's presentation. He pointed out that carbon dioxide (CO2) was not the only potentially harmful emission. Others included most notably methane, widely generated by agriculture, albeit with a shorter-term effect than CO2. Black carbon, a key constituent of exhaust particulate matter, had also come to be recognised as a contributor to global warming and, as such, doubly undesirable, especially as, together with ozone, it can inhibit plant growth and therefore agricultural productivity.

What can be done, at a practical level, to cut air pollution and also combat climate change? Ranjeet put forward a number of measures, in approximate order of value: 1) Move from private car use to public transport (ie bus and train); 2) Promote healthier diets by moving away from meat towards more plant-based foods; 3) Reduce solid fuel (eg coal) burning; 4) Tighten vehicle emission and fuel efficiency standards.

Though it is no excuse for complacency, Ranjeet pointed out that while ultra-fine particle air pollution in London was much worse than in Harpenden, the concentration measured in Karachi, Pakistan, was more than six times greater than London's! **THS**

## 70 years of helping the less fortunate

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the creation of the Harpenden Trust. In 1948 a group of leading figures in the life of what was then the 'Village', including Dr Charles Hill – nationally known as the 'Radio Doctor' – recognised the immediate post-war hardships faced by many materially and financially deprived members of the local community. The newly-formed Trust explored ways in which they could be helped and put into action.

It began with the very basic service of delivering coal to those Harpenden families and individuals who lacked the means to keep themselves comfortably warm in winter. From there it gradually developed into a broader philanthropic organisation. Its Christmas Appeal – via an envelope through every letterbox – which this year raised a record sum of over £53,000, provides the principal finance for the Trust's Care Fund. It gives grants, typically to the elderly, for help for example with household bills, and vouchers for food and clothing.

For those same less fortunate members of the community, the Trust organises summer coach outings and parties at the Trust Centre in Southdown Road. At a recent review of its activities it emerged that around 1000 people in the Harpenden area had benefitted from the Care Fund in one way or another.

Quite separate from the Care Fund is the Trust's Community Fund, established and maintained from major donations, typically from legacies. Through its investments it is able to support worthy local projects, such as the Harpenden Colts junior football club, the Oakley Road play area and providing or updating amenities in schools.

A tangible recent example is the splendid new bus shelter in Southdown Road, next to the Trust Centre, paid for from the Community Fund, which also includes a notice board on which Trust activities and other events of benefit to local people can be advertised.



*Southdown's splendid new bus shelter was paid for from the Harpenden Trust's Community Fund.*

Trust chairman Cedric Kennedy is keen to emphasise that its work is necessarily reliant on a large number of willing volunteers – but more are always welcomed. The Trust will be pleased to hear from any Harpenden Society members, or their friends or acquaintances, with a little (or more) time to spare.

**The Trust can be contacted on 01582 460457 or [admin@theharpendentrust.org.uk](mailto:admin@theharpendentrust.org.uk) . **THS****



# Did You Know?

## From Harpenden's history

### St Mary Childwickbury's 150 years

Those unfamiliar with the area travelling along the A1081 between Harpenden and St Albans might be surprised to learn that the imposing gateway midway between the two urban centres of population leads to not just a grand manor house but a pretty hamlet with its own 'bijou' Anglican church: St Mary's.

Though deemed to be within the parish of St Michael, St Albans, the private estate, including the grounds of Childwickbury Stud, extends northwards to adjoin Hammonds End Farm and, as such, can be said to enjoy a close affinity with Harpenden.

Last year St Mary's, on Childwick Green, celebrated its 150th anniversary, as confirmed by a non too prominently positioned foundation stone. To mark the event a talk was given to Harpenden Local History Society by historian Christine Aitken on the history of the church and its associations with Childwickbury's owners and residents.

From Saxon times, the Manor of Childwick belonged to St Albans Abbey, that is until the dissolution in 1540, when it came to the Crown, and for some 300 years various families had possession. Then in 1854 the estate was bought by one Henry Heyman Toulmin and it was the Toulmin family who built St Mary's church, which was designed by the same architect as St Pancras's grand hotel, namely Sir George Gilbert Scott.

The Faith, Hope and Charity stained glass windows in the chancel are dedicated to the memory of Henry Toulmin and his wife Emily. During their ownership, the Toulmins, concerned about illiteracy among estate workers, also funded the building of a school, with its own resident schoolmistress. The school continued its work under the estate's new owner John Blundell Maple, who took possession in 1883.

Maple, best known for founding the furniture company and store which bore his name in London's Tottenham Court Road, in due course enlarged the church. The elaborate marble font by the church doorway is in memory of Maple's two youngest daughters, who died in early childhood. Sir John Maple, as he became, was a benefactor of several local developments including the building, in Hollybush Lane, Harpenden, of the convalescent home which later became Akrill House.

John Maple died in 1903, aged 58, and his remains were consigned to the subterranean family vault which had been constructed thirteen years earlier in St Mary's Childwickbury church grounds and which today contains the coffins of Sir John and Lady Maple, their two daughters and one grand-daughter.

In 1906, Isaac 'Jack' Barnato Joel, one of three brothers who had made their fortunes in gold and diamond mining in South Africa, became the next owners of Childwickbury

and in June 1921 St Mary's church became fully recognised as a place of worship in St Michael's parish registers. And in August 1925 a licence for Banns and Marriages was granted.

Harry 'Jim' Joel inherited the estate from his father in 1940 and became a highly-successful racehorse breeder and owner. Notwithstanding his Jewish ancestry, he supported the Anglican church, funding new carpets, chandeliers and marble flower pedestals, and in 1947 paid

for the church's first proper heating system. Estate workers – employees of Mr Joel – were made available to carry out repair work on the church and the church flowers were nearly always from the Childwickbury gardens.

'Jim' Joel died in 1992, bequeathing £20,000 to the St Albans Diocesan Board of Finance, requesting that they invest the sum and pay the income to the Parochial Church Council 'for the upkeep, maintenance and repair of the Church and Curtilage of St Mary

Childwick'.

At least eighteen young men from the Childwickbury estate lost their lives in the two World Wars. A fitting memorial is planned when ongoing research on finding all the names is complete. It is intended to take the form of a stone or slate plaque on the front wall of St Mary's church – 'a gentle reminder', in Christine Aitken's words, 'to all who pass by of the sacrifice made by this very small village'.

Mention should be made of the American film director Stanley Kubrick, who bought the Childwickbury estate's 18-bedroom manor house in 1978 and which, following his death in 1999, remains occupied by his widow Christiane, now 85. Film buffs might remember her appearance as a German girl singing to the French troops in the emotional scene at the end of Kubrick's powerful 1957 anti-war film 'Paths of Glory' **THS**



**Acknowledgement: Harpenden Local History Society**

# EDITOR'S VIEW

Alan Bunting

## We're falling prey to 'questionnaire fatigue'

Some of us have begun to think we are suffering from an awful new affliction best described as 'planning survey fatigue'. Its cause can be readily identified as yet another local authority questionnaire dropping through the letterbox asking for our views, this time with a headline invitation from St Albans District Council (SADC) to '**Have your say!**'

It explains that the council is 'writing' – not 'formulating' or even 'compiling' – a new **Local Plan**. However, it is not seeking donations of pencils or ballpens. It is canvassing opinions on: 'Where should new building be located?'; 'What sort of homes do we need?'; 'How can we support business growth?'; and 'What about infrastructure such as transport, schools and green spaces?'.

It gives the appearance of having been cobbled together with indecent haste, suggesting that those councillors and SADC planners responsible for its wording and layout might well have fallen prey to a related strain of that same survey fatigue. The resulting evidently perfunctory approach contrasts with that of its predecessor SADC document which led to the former – and subsequently aborted – Strategic Local Plan.



Ominously there is no mention of Harpenden in the latest 'Have your say!' SADC pamphlet, other than a fleeting reference to Rothamsted Research at the bottom of page 9 and on a map of St Albans District on the back cover. The map highlights in yellow what are now defined as 'Green Belt Review Broad Locations', including the vulnerable tract of agricultural land bounded by the A1081, Bloomfield Road, Ambrose Lane and Cooters End Lane.

Meanwhile, despite the plea from our MP Bim Afolami (see HS Winter Newsletter) for more 'inter authority' collaboration on planning issues, there is not even the most cursory reference in the SADC document to

Harpenden Town Council's own **Neighbourhood Plan (NP)**. That, in itself, does not bode well for the NP's findings being heeded in support of the latest survey's returns from individual Harpenden residents.



Unsurprisingly, a requirement to build more homes will lie at the heart of the new Local Plan. It is a subject guaranteed to arouse controversy, especially as far as its implication for Green Belt erosion is concerned, coupled with the ongoing debate about the need for more 'affordable' homes, especially for first-time buyers. The very word 'affordable' is apt to provoke a knowing sigh, followed by the rhetorical 'affordable by whom?'. The official definition of affordable used by planners is 'selling for price up to 80% of local market value' – a level clearly out of reach of most of those wanting to get on the housing ladder.

In a letter to the Herts Advertiser in December, Rick Sanderson, an experienced planner based in Wheathampstead, points out the often misplaced logical thinking applied by central government which is then forced on local authorities as they calculate housing number requirements.

He contends that, even though there is a desperate need for housing that 'ordinary' people can afford, councils are being compelled to plan for far more houses than are actually needed, in the vain hope that the housing market will provide those dwellings so that the laws of supply and demand will bring house prices down.

Relying on private developers to achieve it will not work, points out Mr Sanderson. He asks rhetorically 'what housebuilder is going to increase output so that the unit price diminishes', resulting in more houses being built for the same, or less, profit?

He adds that within the government's National Planning Policy Framework there is a blurring between housing '**need**' and '**demand**'; but a clear distinction between them is necessary, with need as the housing that households require, even if they cannot afford it, and **demand** as what they can afford, even if they don't need it.

What is really required, says Mr Sanderson – and many will agree with him – is more 'social' housing, provided by local councils or housing associations, at truly affordable rents or on a shared ownership basis, for which successive governments since the 1980s have failed to make provision. **THS**

Please send comments on any 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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# Annual Report 2017/2018

## Looking back - Looking forward

Being a brief account for the Annual General Meeting of The Society's activities during the year 2017/2018 – with a glance ahead to the coming year

## An eventful year

During the six-year tenure of my predecessor as chairman Chris Marsden, the Harpenden Society was successful in raising its profile and in promoting numerous initiatives, notably in relation to the Red House redevelopment, the proposed Arts and Cultural Centre and the volunteering scheme for the library – to name just a few.

Our hard-working committee continues to monitor and become actively involved in specific areas of interest in the town, through its established working groups, covering : built environment; community safety; economic activity; environment; health and welfare; and transport.

In 2017 new groups were created to cover, separately, the arts, education and sports, in place of the former single arts and recreation group. The key matters concerning committee members and the Harpenden Society at large have been the Rothamsted Park arts and cultural centre proposals and the consequent need for us to achieve a closer relationship with all the arts/culture related organisations in the town.

Of no less importance among the society's interests are the continuing 'saga' over the health and wellbeing centre proposed for the Red House site as well as the planned Katherine Warington secondary school at Batford, the latter project prompting the creation of a society education working group. The new school is bound to bring additional road traffic challenges for the town, itself an issue of inevitable concern, set against the backdrop of the town council's Neighbourhood Plan (NP) and St Albans District's broader Local Plan.

The Harpenden Society played a significant part in the development of the NP. Several committee members served on the themed working groups involved in its preparation, helping to ensure its positive vision for sensible future development of the town. A set of clear of local policies for development is critical given the demands being placed upon

St Albans District as a whole for new housing development, as set out in SADC's Local Plan.

Though the objective to provide the right sort of housing whilst protecting our green spaces and the character of our communities are laudable, there is currently an inbuilt financial incentive for developers in this part of the country to build large high-value – and hence high-profit – residences rather than properties affordable by the sons and daughters of established Harpenden townsfolk. The society is also exerting what pressure it can to ensure that major housing developments include proper accompanying infrastructure by way of road access and utilities provision.

Concerns have in any case been raised in recent months by experienced planners as to whether the numbers of new dwellings requiring to be built by central government is accurate, a clearer distinction needing to be made between 'need' and 'demand'. The society intends to contribute fully to the debate on these issues.

And coming down the track too is the plan by Luton Airport to increase significantly its number of flights and passengers, with all the local implications for aircraft noise and road traffic congestion.

Our new MP Bim Afolomi was guest speaker at the society's Autumn public meeting. Then, in December, we welcomed Rosemary Ross from the local history society, who looked back 80 years to recall the controversial birth pangs of the Public Halls. More recently air quality researcher Ranjeet Sokhi from the University of Hertfordshire spoke about atmospheric pollution issues.

At the society's AGM in April we hope to provide an update on the Red House plans and an extra meeting scheduled for May will give us the chance to hear and comment on the plans for the expansion of Luton Airport.

**Phil Waters, *Chairman***

## Secretary's Report

### 2017: a busy and successful year

It has been a successful year for Harpenden Society activities. During 2017 we held six evening meetings in Park Hall, as ever open to the public as well as members. Every meeting was well attended, with lively Q&A audience participation.

Five guest speakers gave their at times controversial views on transport and related issues at our January meeting under the heading of 'Shaping the way we travel'. A packed attendance was treated to an exceptionally vigorous debate on such thorny subjects as traffic congestion and, perhaps most contentious, car parking.

Harpenden's Neighbourhood Plan came under the spotlight at the March public meeting, where town clerk Carl Cheevers said the NP gave residents the opportunity to 'get involved', by completing the questionnaire circulated by the Town Council to 13,500 households in the town and attending one of the associated drop-in sessions.

Guest speaker at the April meeting was Simon Linnett, chairman of Luton & Dunstable University Hospital Trust. He provided reassurance about L&D's ongoing provision of services to Harpenden and surrounding Hertfordshire villages, pointing out that 10% of L&D's income from the NHS was in respect of its service to the population of that Hertfordshire 'enclave'.

Addressing an audience of over 100 of his constituents at a packed September meeting, the town's new MP, Bim Afolami, called for a more strategic approach to planning challenges, rather than the ad hoc process which often resulted from local authority differences.

At the similarly well-attended October meeting, the planning portfolio holder on St Albans District Council, Cllr.Mary Maynard, provided an update on preparation of the council's revised (seemingly no longer 'Strategic') Local Plan.

The Harpenden Society updated its constitution in 2017, enabling it to offer affiliate membership to charity and 'not for profit' organisations. The updated constitution can be found on the Society's website.

**Bob Fletcher**

## Health and Welfare

### A continuing healthy outlook

The main focus of the Health and Welfare working group over the past year has continued to be proposals for the Harpenden Memorial Hospital site in Carlton Road, through close involvement with the Red House Forum 'ginger group', which was formed nearly seven years ago. As group leader I am also a member of the Hertfordshire Community Trust (HCT) Red House Project Group, which owns the site and is driving the development.

However, progress is dependent on completion of the final business plan, which is currently awaited. It must show that the project is financially viable, based on the provision of services from the proposed new facility. HCT is due to provide an update at a Harpenden Society evening meeting in April.

Other work of the H&W group has been providing feedback on the NHS Sustainability and Transformation Plans (STP), intended to bring together all the health providers within county areas. Luton & Dunstable Hospital is accordingly working on a proposed administrative merger with Bedford Hospital. At a Harpenden Society meeting in April last year, Simon Linnett, chairman since 2014 of L&D University Hospital Trust, gave an assurance that such changes would not affect the people of Harpenden continuing to be served by the hospital.

**John Harris**

## Arts and Leisure

### Boost for Arts & Leisure in prospect

Unsurprisingly, the Harpenden Society's main concerns in the field of arts, leisure and entertainment have focussed on the proposed new Arts and Cultural Centre – or 'Hub' – due to be housed in the shell of the current sports centre building in Rothamsted Park. Following St Albans District Council's initial public consultation process, based on a local residents' 'wish list', the emphasis for the society has been to monitor progress of the design phase and ensure that public feedback was fully taken into account. SADC submitted its planning application in January 2018, several months later than originally planned.

The Society generally supports the proposals and has endeavoured to raise local awareness and engender local approval for the project. To no one's surprise it is likely that the new centre will not be operational as early as had been anticipated and so it is essential that the existing Public Halls are kept fully functional for at least two more years; the Society will argue strongly for this.

It is hoped that when the new Centre is launched there will be many opportunities for the society to support its inauguration and sustain its activities; these opportunities are being identified. It is also intended to encourage discussion among local arts interests regarding the uses to which the new facility might be put and the manner in which people would like to see it run. For now, the current emphasis is on making contact with our future arts leaders and on envisaging how the opportunities provided by the new facility might invigorate Harpenden's arts scene.

**Alan Jackson**

## Built Environment

### Wrong sort of homes planned

Planning applications have continued to be monitored over the last year, and objections lodged by the Harpenden Society as felt necessary, notably where it was considered the proposal contravened good planning/design principles or could have adverse effects on the town centre and designated Conservation Area.

Regrettably, much more can now be done within the rules of 'permitted development' set by central government, restricting the scope for objections, even those from local authority planners. Equally concerning, the government has said it is considering further relaxation of rules for home extensions, including loft conversions.

There continues to be an increasing number of applications in Harpenden to demolish an existing dwelling and replace it with two or more units or to unlock a backland site for a larger scheme. Some such proposals have little merit other than the construction of more homes, but in most cases these tend to be larger detached properties, rather than more modest two- or three-bedroom homes – deemed 'affordable' by some criteria – which are badly needed.

Several applications to build new blocks of flats in and around the town centre have been submitted. Whilst these would provide more homes, the society has been concerned that the blocks are disproportionately large for the sites and provide inadequate car parking. Nowadays in Harpenden a single off-road parking space for a large flat is unlikely to be sufficient.

**John Lowe/Pauline Waddilove**

## Society Awards

At last year's Harpenden Society AGM, the primary award for developments completed in 2016 went to Shanly Homes for its Stonehurst Court apartment block at Southdown, immediately adjacent to the Harpenden Trust Centre, on the site of the former (long derelict) Rose & Crown pub. Secondary awards went to the Oddfellows Arms in Amenbury Lane and the Royal British Legion in Leyton Road, both of which had undergone extensive upgrades in appearance and structurally, to the benefit of the townscape.

The aim of our Awards scheme is to recognise and applaud developments which have contributed to the ambience and appearance of Harpenden. They need to be of architectural merit or of historic or other public interest, or which otherwise contribute visually or socially to the locality.

Harpenden Society members and others in the town are invited to suggest what they deem worthy nominations for consideration by the five members of the society's Awards Group. The top Award is the prestigious Harpenden Society Plaque, designed for permanent display attached prominently on the winning building. A Certificate of Merit goes to the runner-up and a Letter of Commendation to other suitable nominations. The Awards are presented at the Harpenden Society AGM.

**Penny Ayres**



## Environment

### Pleasant surroundings – a worthwhile aim

Our local environment is arguably under greater threat than ever before, as Harpenden's growing population generates more road traffic emitting an increasing quantity of pollution, to the detriment of air quality. This was spelled out in detail by atmospheric researcher Ranjeet Sokhi, guest speaker at the Society's February meeting.

His analysis included a reference to the harmful emissions attributable to aviation – a salutary reminder of the environmental implications for Harpenden of Luton Airport's plans for expansion, not least in terms of additional aircraft noise, at night as well as during daylight hours. Those plans necessarily also include increases in traffic volumes in the roads feeding the airport.

A gleam of hope in the battle to restrain what has, in recent years, seemed to be an uncontrolled increase in the number of flights in and out of Luton, emerged during the visit by a group of Harpenden residents to the Houses of Parliament hosted by our MP Bim Afolami. In answer to a question put by a constituent during the visit, Mr Afolami indicated that there was now a recognition by central government that Luton Borough Council's position as 'judge and jury' in approving airport expansion was essentially untenable.

On more everyday environmental matters, Harpenden Society members (and their friends and neighbours) are urged to bring to the attention of the relevant authority such issues as overflowing litter bins, blocked drain gratings and neglected and/or unsightly buildings. **NB. Contact details are on the Society web site ; click on Activities, then Environmental Issues**

John Davis

## Education

The Society's newly-formed Education Working Group is intended to keep members informed of some of the projects, initiatives and news of interest relating to Harpenden's secondary and primary schools. Monitoring progress on the Katherine Warington school development at Batford is, perhaps inevitably, at the forefront of our deliberations.

Among more everyday issues, one of our main priorities must be for the Society in any way possible to support the schools in their efforts to relieve the huge problem of traffic congestion on the roads around schools at the beginning and the end of the school day. It is a tall order, in the face of issues such as pupil safety and inclement weather, but one that cannot be ignored in the context of Harpenden's manifold transport challenges.

An introductory meeting has taken place with headteachers to explore possible strategies where the Harpenden Society could play a supporting role, by way of publicity for example. Information is being gathered on individual schools' travel plans with a view to helping fulfil Harpenden's Transport and Movement Vision.

Harpenden is served by wonderful schools, and it is the Society's declared resolve to celebrate their academic and other achievements.

Chris Armitage

## Community Safety

### Remaining vigilant

Though we tend to consider Harpenden 'enjoying' a low crime rate, police statistics for 2017, for the 'Harpenden and Rural' area, show a 14% increase in recorded crime compared with 2016.

A recent article in the Herts Advertiser claimed that criminal activity in St Albans had risen by 26%. The chief inspector nevertheless maintained that high-visibility as well as covert police patrols had been increased and several arrests made leading to convictions. He added that Harpenden was now covered 24/7 by 'uniformed intervention teams' and Safer Neighbourhood team officers.

The often conflicting police data tends to confirm however the view, not just of cynics, that 'there are lies, damned lies and statistics'. Be that as it may, available figures indicate that, per head of population, Harpenden suffers a crime rate about four times greater than St Albans. Those aforementioned cynics might attribute our closer proximity to Luton as a contributing factor.

A spate of recent burglaries in the Roundwood/Wood End has undoubtedly given an unwelcome boost to the crime statistics. Nevertheless a straw poll among residents across the town indicated a wish for the police to prioritise their investigations into speeding and fly-tipping. If you compare the St Albans figures with Harpenden and Rural and adjust for relative population sizes, Harpenden has about four times more crime than St Albans.

Looking forward we should all take note of the advice given by the police to protect our property. We now have a page on the Harpenden Society website offering advice on combatting the main types of crime. To keep up to date sign up to the online watch link (OWL) system at [www.owl.co.uk](http://www.owl.co.uk) to receive information and advice by email.

Paul Gardiner

## Treasurer's Report

In 2017 we had a surplus of income over expenditure amounting to £1,928.01, which is just £40 less than last year and leaves us with an accumulated surplus of £13,919.39. Our income from subscriptions and donations was £4,911.50, down from £5,370 last year. Gift aid was also down from £1,147.75 to £1,066.04. Total income, including a small amount of interest, amounted to £5,979.83, down £544 on last year.

Expenditure amounted to £4,051.82, £504 less than last year. Newsletters are more expensive since we moved to more pages but savings have been made by spending less on public meetings and the AGM spending £787.50 compared to £1,690.05 the previous year. Subscriptions to other societies was up because of a donation to Harpenden Greenbelt Association of £100.

There were several other small fluctuations year on year but the net result means that we have a stable financial position taking us forward.

Harry Downie

## Transport

### Getting around – no easier!

Hertfordshire's County Transport Plan was launched with a fanfare last year and submitted 'for consultation'. The outcome is awaited, though for Harpenden its impact, by way of any improvements, appears minimal.

On specific issues the Harpenden Hopper local minibs service continues at a low level of patronage, not helped by a suspension of the service early this year, attributed to mechanical problems with the relatively-aged Mercedes vehicle. Nevertheless an expansion of the route to cover residential areas to the south of the town is mooted.

Parking remains the 'big issue'. Streets progressively further away from Harpenden Station, particularly in 'the Avenues' area, are now clogged, from morning to evening on Mondays to Fridays, by commuters' cars. St Albans District Council's 'Car parking working party' has so far shown itself impotent, kicking the issue into the proverbial long grass by that favourite public sector ploy of 'launching a survey!'. Its findings are, unsurprisingly, still awaited.

Meanwhile, the HarPark activist group, supported by the Harpenden Society's Transport Working Group has at least gained the positive attention of our new MP Bim Afolami to HarPark's improvement proposals. Meanwhile Harpenden Town Council abrogates any responsibility on parking issues.

The Harpenden Society has involved itself with bus, train and cycling user groups, reviewing key issues of accessibility, service, pollution and congestion. All those user groups are commendably active. Thameslink's adherence to its published timetables remains subject to spasmodic criticism; a major improvement is promised for May.

Roadworks of one kind or another are made necessary by either road surface degradation or repair/maintenance of utilities. Bad weather may well be the cause – but it should not be the excuse – for the proliferation of recurring potholes throughout Harpenden, in major and minor roads, now awaiting repairs.

Alan Falconer

## Publicity /PR

Communicating with our members and the local community requires creative content and images to make an impact in today's world of fast changing news. We achieved this with regular posters and press releases; a stand and a lively competition at Discovery Day on Harpenden Common; news updates on our web site; new display stands to use at our public meetings. (See images below)



**THE NEW STRATEGIC LOCAL PLAN**  
Cllr. Mary Maynard will explain the changes & how it will affect future of Harpenden  
**Thursday Oct 19**



Public Meeting  
7.30 pm Reception  
8.00 pm Start  
Thursday Oct 19  
Park Hall, Leyton Road  
Harpenden



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



**PressRelease;**  
The Harpenden Society Public Meeting Sept 21. 2017

Ron Taylor

## Membership

### Still striving for that 'magic' thousand membership

This year our recorded membership has dropped by fifteen to 964. Some people who have left Harpenden have not renewed their membership, though others continue to support us 'from a distance'. Needless to say, we welcome all those members who have joined the society in the last year or so, their interest undoubtedly stimulated in many instances by our involvement in proposals for the new sports and culture hub in Rothamsted Park and for the Red House site.

Meanwhile others, typically society members of very long standing, have sadly passed away. We nevertheless keep our eyes on the so-far elusive 1000 member target, which from a town with a population of some 30,000 must be a realistic ambition, even amongst those with already busy lives. Any

ideas on stimulating new member recruitment would be more than welcome.

After two years as membership secretary – on an enthusiastic and caring Harpenden Society committee – it is gratifying to know we are working with the same aim. We are striving to help make the town's wider population aware of the many changes confronting us all and of ways they can play a part in influencing those changes for the better, not only for ourselves but for future generations.

Meanwhile, heartfelt thanks are due to our small army of committed newsletter deliverers who, four times a year, in rain or shine, ensure its distribution through members' letterboxes. Without their dedication we would be faced with formidable postage costs.

The Society's committee and its dozen working groups remain optimistic about our continuing activity in 2018 and beyond.

Jan Smith

Please note that this is your official notice that the 2018 Annual General Meeting of The Harpenden Society will take place as part of it's general meeting to be held at 7.30 for 8.00 pm on Thursday 19 April 2018 at Rothamsted Conference Centre.