



Spring News 2023 Founded in 1930

Piper's Lane – new Green Belt issue looming

A further erosion of the Green Belt around Harpenden, this time on the south-east fringes of the town, is threatened by the big national developer Taylor Wimpey. In response to St Albans District Council's 2021 'call for sites' – in order to meet its government-decreed housing-building targets – the company proposes building about 220 homes on 21.5 acres of Green Belt land off rural Piper's Lane.

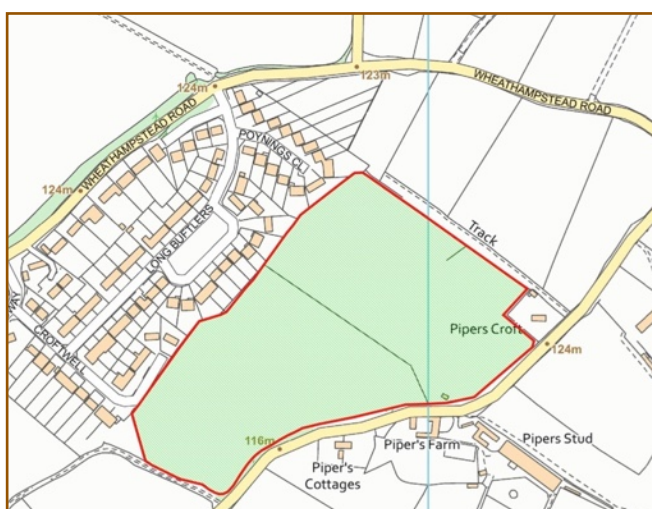
Presently comprising two agricultural fields belonging to Piper's Farm, the site is located in Wheathampstead Parish, that is outside Harpenden Town boundary. But, in common with the immediately adjacent houses in Long Buftlers, Croftwell and Poynings Close, it is within SADC's Harpenden South electoral ward and, as such, merits concern by townspeople and the town council.

It is not the first time this area of attractive local countryside has come under threat of building encroachment. A decade or more ago it was on the short list of potential sites for Harpenden's new secondary school, which in due course resulted in the impressive Katherine Warrington School being built at Common Lane, Batford.

Residents in those roads close to the Piper's Lane site have pointed out that the owners of the land strongly resisted the new school plans, but now appear to be welcoming the latest housing development approach from Taylor Wimpey. The documentation accompanying the 'call for sites' submission to SADC states that "Taylor Wimpey have an option agreement with the landowner".

According to the developer, 'the site is considered to be suitable, available and achievable for residential development, with no contamination/pollution, environmental (eg tree preservation order) or flood risk issues'. Access to the

site (for potential residents of any approved development) is deemed not to be an issue, though any access via Piper's Lane would appear impractical because of its 'single track with passing places' character.



Although no planning permission has yet been sought, Taylor Wimpey states that, 'the site is being promoted through the *emerging* (editor's italics) Local Plan', without reference to the ongoing uncertainty of when SADC will have completed – and obtained government approval for – its much vaunted but repeatedly-delayed Local Plan.

In a bid to make a future planning application regarded more favourably, Taylor Wimpey – like L&G with its house building proposals at the other end of the town – pledges the inclusion of 'affordable' homes (though with no percentage of the 220 total quoted), and a 'public open

space' (of an as yet unspecified area). Creation of an (undefined) 'new landscaped settlement edge' is envisaged, though the company says such finer details are provisional at this early stage.

It is asserted that the site 'is particularly well located in relation to a number of schools' and, in a note of arguably questionable optimism, 'future residents would have access to these without reliance on the private car'. Katherine Warrington School is singled out as being 'less than a mile from the site'. Reference to a map shows that that is measured 'as the crow flies'. The shortest routes by road are impractically tortuous, via Leasey Bridge and Cherry Tree

lanes, both single-track with muddy passing places and no side footpaths. A slightly longer alternative is via the equally challenging single-track length of Piggottshill Lane past Harpenden sewage works. More readily negotiable routes are far longer – two miles or more.

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Taylor Wimpey acknowledges that the Piper's Lane site's current Green Belt status is a legislative impediment to its development for housing. The company however asserts that its 21.5 acres make 'a limited contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt and – given the extent of housing need, together with the suitability and sustainability of the site to help meet this – exceptional circumstances exist which justify its removal from the Green Belt'.

It is clear however from soundings among residents of the area that if and when Taylor Wimpey submits a planning application for the Piper's Farm site, there will be substantial opposition from the wider populace of Harpenden to what many see as a wholly unwelcome precedent in eroding the town's attractive rural hinterland.

Aldwickbury housing plans updated

More details have been obtained of the outline application (referred to in our Winter newsletter) to build up to 40 houses on Green Belt land described as being 'north of Wheathampstead Road'. The planning applicant is named as Wheathampstead Land Company and the site in question comprises about 5.4 acres of farm/paddock land adjacent to the grounds of Aldwick Manor, Aldwickbury School and the private entry road to Aldwickbury Golf Club.

Access to the projected homes would be from the narrow section of Piggottshill Lane which leads down to the sewage works, that is between the roundabout junction with Alzey Gardens and the golf club entrance.

A range of opposition to the proposed development has already been registered by nearby residents, notably in Wheathampstead Road, Hilltop Walk and Alzey Gardens. Many have highlighted the narrow width of Piggottshill Lane already becoming congested at school times with children walking to and from Katherine Warington school and the cars of their parents dropping and meeting them.

The Aldwickbury site's environmentally-valuable Green Belt status is cited by the **Harpenden Society** as justification for the application's rejection, such a development being contrary to national and local planning policies. There are, we assert, no 'special circumstances' that justify consent being granted.

Supporting opposition has come from the CPRE (now styled 'The Countryside Charity') which points out that the National Planning Policy Framework is clear that 'Green Belt boundaries should be altered only through the Local Plan process and not through individual planning applications'.

Meanwhile the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust has declared that 'a full ecological survey is required for the Aldwickbury site (which includes three existing copses of mature woodland), so that impacts on wildlife can be understood, in order to achieve a biodiversity net gain'.



Forty houses could be built on this paddock/field behind Aldwickbury School

Cross Lane housing plans submitted to SADC

Following the 'Cross Lane hamlet' news item in our Autumn 2022 newsletter, the Lansdown property group has, some four months later than predicted, submitted an outline planning application to St Albans District Council for the development of up to 31 dwellings on 16.5 acres of designated Green Belt farmland on the southern rural fringes of Harpenden. The project's detail design has been undertaken by ImaginePlaces, a housing development consultancy.

Unusually, the proposals comprise 19 'custom and self-build' and 12 'shared ownership' (deemed 'affordable') homes. In the former category are, in Lansdown's words, 'serviced

plots of a variety of sizes to cater to a broad range of self-build budgets', while it is intended that the shared-ownership homes will be made up of one-, two-, three- and four-bedroom units meant 'to respond to local housing need'.

A further somewhat esoteric quote from Lansdown's promotional material is that 'the design codes explore farmstead typologies, more utilitarian agricultural building characteristics and 21st century pioneering low carbon design, construction and living for a domestic context'.

Other details are as we spelled out in our earlier newsletter report and the **Harpenden Society's** views remain that the Cross Lane plans contravene statutory Green

Belt restrictions and, as such, should be opposed as creating an unwelcome precedent.



Plans now submitted to build on Cross Lane fields

Keeping the fraudsters at bay

How people in Harpenden can protect themselves, their families and neighbours against the modern scourge of cheats and 'scammers', was a major theme of a public

meeting convened by the **Harpenden Society** at the end of April, attended by over 40 Society members at Katherine Warington School. (right)



Two experts professionally involved in the day-to-day protection of vulnerable individuals against 21st Century charlatans, spelled out in detail the many ruses employed by unscrupulous traders in trying to part people, typically older householders, from their money, through dishonest and shameless trickery.

Sue Shanahan from Hertfordshire Trading Standards pointed out that fraud perpetrated against private individuals was the UK's fastest-



Sue Shanahan: 'beware the doorstep scammers'

growing type of crime, though regrettably the least reported in the media. She categorised 'doorstep crime' as being the most prevalent, typified by 'cold callers'. They would often offer to rectify non-existent faults or damage.

Rooves, guttering and trees were favourites for the fraudsters' attention, and whose condition many householders would be unlikely to have heeded but which could cause concern to the gullible. A verbal quote would be given, there on the doorstep, which was obviously 'negotiable', but which the rogue trader would try to use to metaphorically get his (or her) foot in the door. And one should always remember, pointed out Ms Shanahan, that what appeared at first sight to be a small job was likely, according to the 'cowboy' trader, to be blown up into a much larger, more costly and probably more unnecessary one.

Ms Shanahan made a number of doorstep scam-avoiding recommendations. If you can see who was ringing the doorbell and they were unfamiliar and/or suspicious in appearance, one shouldn't even open the door. If a job needs doing on the house, rely on word-of-mouth recommendations from neighbours to find an honest and reliable trader.

Among the more obvious advice, as well as asking for a written quote, is never to pay first-time traders 'up front',

even when asked for money to buy materials to start the job. One's suspicions should also be raised should the individual insist on being paid in cash – a likely sign that the Exchequer is being deprived of some tax revenue.

Ideally one should consult one of the Trusted Trader websites to minimise the risk of being 'ripped off' or otherwise cheated by the many shameless individuals ready to take advantage of hapless, often elderly, householders.

'Goods' as well as 'services' come into the realm of doorstep fraud. Ms Shanahan brought to the attention of her audience what traditionally would have been classed as hawkers or pedlars, endeavouring to sell household items on the doorstep, for example dusters or ironing board covers, usually cheaper than in the shops. Such items might or might not 'having fallen off the back of a lorry', the seller being innocent or otherwise.

Such hucksters are likely to accompany their sales patter with a tale of woe, typically that they have recently come out of prison and are now wanting to go straight – a story which tends to subtly combine intimidation with invited sympathy. The advice therefore was to politely but firmly decline their bargain offers.



Daniel McManus: 'sign up for OWL alerts'

Ms Shanahan was supported at the Harpenden Society meeting by Daniel McManus, a staff member of Herts Constabulary, who outlined the work of the Neighbourhood Watch and OWL schemes, which come under the aegis of local police. There were, he said, five police offices across the county operating Neighbourhood Watch schemes, St Albans being one of ten districts. Over 170,000 households (34%) had signed up to receive cautionary OWL online messages about what was mainly petty, albeit serious, criminal activity and threats to individual safety. Others were encouraged to sign up for OWL alerts.

Citing Sir Robert Peel, father of Britain's police some 200 years ago, Mr McManus said both schemes were aimed first and foremost at petty crime PREVENTION, through Crime and Safety Alerts and due diligence by householders. CrimeStoppers, ActionFraud, AgeUK, National Cyber Security Centre, Herts County Council and the NHS were among those bodies which interacted with the OWL scheme as partners in striving to thwart the criminals.

CONTACT DETAILS: A. Straight Fraud: Lying on phone & bank frauds. Report to the Police via Action Fraud 0300 123 2040. OR www.actionfraud.police.uk OR If goods and services are involved ring Trading Standards via Citizens Advice 0808 223 1133 SEE THE OWL & TRADING STANDARDS PRESENTATIONS:<http://www.harpendensociety.org/27-April-Meeting.html>

Museum update

In our Winter newsletter we reported on progress with the fitting out of the new Harpenden Museum on the lower ground floor of the Eric Morecambe Centre in Rothamsted Park. Its public opening has gratifyingly now moved closer and those attending the Seniors' Fair in early April were able to enjoy a 'sneak preview' and found it bright and welcoming. Curator David Keen says there are some text graphics to be written and one or two minor snags which need rectifying, but Qwerk (the Luton-based specialist exhibition contractor) has completed the major work.



'Shop window' helps publicise the museum to EMC event attendees

Some artefacts are already on display. The next task, says David, is selecting, installing and labelling the rest of the objects, documents, photographs and paintings to go on display, which is going to be relatively time-consuming. Meanwhile the outward-facing 'shop window' (publicising the Museum, even when it is closed to EMC patrons) already contains reminders of Harpenden's absorbing history, including for example the original coffee grinder from Ward's grocery store at Southdown, similar to the one which, some years later many will recall, stood in Harpenden's shop window in the Lower High Street. The only missing element, says David wistfully, is the associated evocative aroma!



'Old Harpenden coat-of-arms betokens local agriculture and Scottish links.

Inside the Museum, the old Harpenden town sign has prominence and a tall display case has been installed to hold the Ensign from HMS Harpenden, the erstwhile paddle steamer pressed into war service in 1918. The other display cases are ready to receive other historic items including the painting of Harpenden Common by renowned local artist Frank Salisbury.



'View across Harpenden Common painted by Frank Salisbury

Immediately to the right of the Museum entrance is displayed one of its latest acquisitions - a collection of three wooden sculptures by Basil Kassanis, a distinguished agricultural scientist at Rothamsted who was also a talented wood carver. It was donated by former Harpenden resident David Burnett. The hart above the Harpenden sign is also Kassanis's work.



Wooden sculptures by Rothamsted scientist Basil Kassanis

In Harpenden Local History Society's monumental efforts to establish the Museum, David pays tribute to Herts County Council's Museum Development team who continue to provide helpful advice, as the (yet to be determined) official opening date approaches.

New skatepark plans set in concrete

Plans have been approved by Harpenden Town Council, and a £250,000 budget allocated, for the present somewhat time-worn skatepark in Rothamsted Park – beloved by young skateboarders and BMX riders especially – to be replaced with a more imaginative and up-to-date facility.

Crucially it will comprise an infinitely-durable moulded concrete structure, in contrast to the existing fabricated configuration, among whose merits will be an assured reduction in operational noise for those nearby enjoying the tranquility of the park.

The town council's partnership with the PARC charity, which has over the last two years upgraded and brightened several children's play areas in and around Harpenden, including that in Rothamsted Park, is geared to bring the new skatepark to fruition.

Detail design of the ramps, swoops and other essential profiles vital to ensuring maximum enjoyment for users, is being undertaken by Betongpark, a world-leading installer of skateparks headquartered in Oslo, Norway, while nevertheless taking into account local input from an HTC community survey at the end of last year. The total cost is having to be met from local fundraising in addition to direct council expenditure – a factor on which target completion by Summer 2024 is also dependent.

In its announcement of the skatepark replacement project the town council spelt out a number of key guidelines that would be followed: that it would occupy the same groundspace in the park, alongside the Harpenden Leisure Centre; it would include features appealing to those of all ages and experience, from young children up to adults; and it would also cater for WCMX (adapted wheelchairs), scooters, roller skates and roller blades.



Existing Skatepark ramps, due for a more permanent installation



Conservation volunteers wanted

Four years ago the informally designated Harpenden Conservation group came together, necessarily focussed on historically important as well as invariably attractive parts of the town. Pressure from developers, and others driven primarily by commercial considerations, wanting to modernise the townscape thoughtlessly, has gradually increased the need for conservation efforts on behalf of the many who love the town.

Now, under the aegis of the Town Council's newly-established Conservation Working Party, and through liaison with St Albans District Council's Conservation Officer, volunteers are being sought to undertake reviews of buildings and street-scenes in those parts of the town deemed worthy of protection.

They should ideally be ready to commit between two and four half-days a month. The aim is for the programme to begin in September after a short period of 'training' on the review methodology and the computer system to enter data .

Anyone interested in helping to maintain Harpenden's attractive heritage is asked to contact Hester Gabbutt hester530@yahoo.co.uk



Park Hall – a familiar building in the town exemplifying the need for active conservation

Connecting HARPENDEN

Sharing all that's good about Harpenden

Only connect

As our recent member recruitment flyer proclaimed, Harpenden is a great place to live, for which there are many reasons. Not least are the amazing number of voluntary as well as professional organisations and public services which contribute to the quality of life we are able to enjoy.

The **Harpenden Society** is one of the longest established among them, having been founded ninety-three years ago – and we continue to thrive. And in a move directed at further widening our remit of 'caring about our town' the Society has now taken under its wing the website-based Connecting Harpenden, launched a few years ago with its declared aim of 'Sharing everything that's good about Harpenden'.

Visitors to its colourful, informative and easily navigable website at www.connectingharpenden.org.uk can obtain information and of course contact details, most

prominently of community organisations in the town, under such headings as 'care services', 'local events', 'transport' and, of prime interest to older folk in the winter months, 'warm spaces'.

There is guidance on how to contact local authorities, at town, district or county level with advice and, of course complaints, about public services. Other sources of help, through Citizens'Advice for example, are listed. 'Adult Learning', 'Seniors' and 'Befriending' are other notable headings which can be clicked on for more details.

Among other sections on the website are 'Health & Care', 'Nature & Environment', 'Leisure' and 'Young People'. Connecting Harpenden welcomes information by email to secretary@harpendensociety.org about activities not already included on the website.

KWS commissions elaborate new gym

Almost three years ago, in our Summer 2020 newsletter, we were able to proclaim that Harpenden's eagerly-awaited new secondary school was 'up and running'. Katherine Warington School had, in fact, taken its first 180 students in September of the previous year.

They were temporarily housed in what has now become the school's Sports Centre, thus so designated – a separate building some 100 yards away from the main school complex. Its prime role in enhancing the physical wellbeing of KWS students has now come to full fruition with the fitting out of the Sports Centre's gymnasium, under the tutelage of 'Head of Gym' Jamie Alexander.



Keep-fit gym equipment includes rowing machines, a treadmill and static 'bicycles'



Jamie Alexander: 'weekly challenges encourage gym activity'

Its £10,000's worth of gymnasium equipment would meet the aspirations of the most ardent keep-fit enthusiast; it includes rowing machines and a hi-tech weight training frame, together with simpler, though purpose-made, items such as skipping ropes.

Jamie explains that everything is done to encourage KWS students to make use of the newly-equipped gym, through membership of lunchtime and after-school 'clubs', where weekly fitness-

related challenges add to the appeal of keeping fit and active. He points out that, perhaps unsurprisingly,



girls are often more reluctant than boys to get involved – something that



Jamie demonstrates 'Life Fitness' weight training rig

is recognised and, where possible, addressed.

Traditional PE (physical education) activity classes are held in the gymnasium's adjacent spacious 'circuit room' which is due to fulfill further roles as a dance studio and a training space for aspiring boxers. KWS's PE syllabus is broader than that of many schools in the past, with relevant links to GCSE level biology.

Since KWS opened there has been a new intake of 11-year-olds arriving each September. And it will be three more years before the pupil headcount reaches its designed 'capacity' of 1150, by which time all its impressively modern facilities, including the splendid new gym, are due to be in full use, not just by the school's own students but by outside organisations whose hire payments for use of those facilities contribute welcome revenue to KWS's finances.

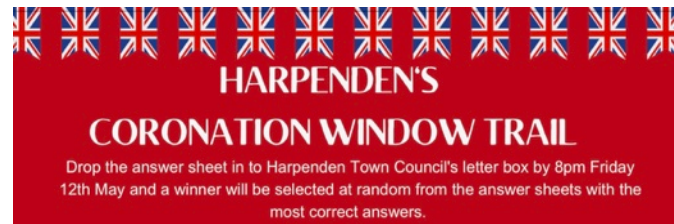
Harpenden High Street reigns supreme says Ron Taylor

The Coronation of King Charles III on May 6th provided a welcome opportunity to boost business across all sectors of the High Street. That didn't stop the earlier trend of



shop closures (Feb/March) mainly due to high rent and rates. Coppers Boots and Shoes; Parker & Vine and Creature Comforts

which all closed their High Street premises. Having said that Parker&Vine have now set up an online private catering business and Creature Comforts have moved to larger premises on the Southdown Industrial Estate. And Silver Palate Deli are expanding their store by 'knocking through in the adjacent and now empty Creature Comforts



Setting the Royal Scene

Harpenden Town Council announced a series of activities including The Coronation Window Trail to win a Hamper. Entrants had to visit 26 stores and drop answers to the questions on the entry form, then return it to the Town Hall. The winner would be selected after closing date of May 12.



Coloured bunting was hung around parts of the High Street to generate an air of celebration. This celebratory concept was integrated across all parts of the High Street. Harpenden Library had a colourful display in the



'foyer' (see right).

Clarendon Fine Arts showed the latest portrait of our future King in their window. Created by world famous artist, Mr Brainwash.



Several shops made a real effort to create 'Royal' themed windows featuring lots of themed products, perfect as souvenirs or regular use, these being Serena Hart, Perry Florist and Threads. Loveweds featured a range of jewellery to commemorate the Coronation and served champagne in the store on May 6.



Joint Ventures

Forward thinking OUI, SPACENK and Majestic held a 'Summer Glam' evening on May 2 with make up dems, mini fashion parade and sparkling wine tasting



+ a

raffle for St Francis Hospice.

New Openings.

The lure of hospitality in Harpenden has not waned even though Prezzo announced the closure of Harpenden's restaurant. Turkish restaurant group has just opened LOSH in Station Road and a Persian restaurant will open soon at the north end of the High Street. In Southdown a Sushi Bar 'BentoZo' is now open.



Mum's guide to Harpenden - 10 years and counting

Established in 2012, **Mum's guide to Harpenden** has grown from having a few hundred visits a month to averaging around 11,000 visits each month. It is recognised as a valuable service across the town and has established itself as a major supplier of information for parents and carers.

So how did it all evolve? Frustrated by how difficult it could be to find out about all the classes, clubs and events for children and families in the town, the fledgling organisation set up its impressively informative website. The praiseworthy aim was to create a single go-to place where parents and carers could readily find what was available locally, by way of health services, education, party providers, holiday clubs and other child-centred facilities.

On the Mum's guide to Harpenden website are comprehensive and regularly-updated listings of local relevant businesses – who are not charged for inclusion. Local organisations catering for the needs and interests of parents and children are eligible for the annual MGT Harpenden Awards. Notable among the 2022 Award winners were The Little Gym Harpenden (in three different

categories), Funnybones Music, SAADI Gymnastics and Zing Wellness.

Interest in the **Mum's guide to Harpenden** modus operandi has grown over the decade, leading to the creation of 11 other websites under the same banner in towns as far away as Huntingdon and Romford. Meanwhile the original website in Harpenden, founded by Katie Fenner, Alison Fox, Carol Rule and Angela Woodhead continues to flourish, though the team now operates without Katie, who has moved onto pastures new [running local music school, Musicale].



2019 MGT Harpenden Awards Ceremony - l to r: Carol, Angela, Katie, Alison

Their activities can also be seen on their website www.mumsguideto.co.uk/harpenden, and Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

Kingston House pub plans resubmitted

Oakman Inns have, after more than a year's delay – the premises remaining empty and neglected – made a second application to convert the former Kingston House (latterly M&Co) shop site at no 6 High Street into a large capacity pub/restaurant. The original application, submitted in 2021, was rejected by St Albans District Council, critically because the proposed conservatory style second floor roof extension was deemed inappropriate for the Harpenden Conservation Area.

Despite the modified design, which shows a less intrusive roof terrace layout, the **Harpenden Society** has formally maintained its opposition to the development for several reasons, one being the inevitably adverse impact on adjoining residential occupiers.

More fundamentally, Harpenden is nowadays served by a limited range of retailers, as opposed to eating and/or drinking outlets. Many people living in the town feel obliged to travel, almost inevitably by car, to St Albans,

Welwyn Garden City, Luton or elsewhere for household basics other than groceries at competitive prices.

It is an important landmark site, at what can be regarded as the entrance to the town. Yet another pub/restaurant, immediately adjacent to The George, an existing 'gastropub', would create minimal benefit in terms of footfall for Harpenden's existing retailers.

If Oakman's revised application was approved, the premises would require regular servicing by large delivery and waste vehicles, via rear access from Leyton Road. As many townspeople could testify, vehicles already serving The George as well as nearby Pizza Express and Café Nero seriously impede traffic flow, with an accompanying hazard for pedestrians, not least at the T-junction of Leyton Road and Amenbury Lane, now increasingly busy since the opening of Harpenden Leisure Centre.

In the event of SADC planners giving the go-ahead to the Oakman scheme, then it should be conditional on the imposition of a robust traffic management scheme, involving tighter control of parking for delivery and waste lorries directly outside the premises, ideally restricted to early mornings and/or weekends.



Getting on our bikes

We are nowadays exhorted, most notably by climate-change aware environmentalists, to get out of our cars and start pedalling, for the good of our health as well as that of the planet. Cycling is even being invoked by such unlikely champions as the L&G group in promoting its controversial 'North West Harpenden' house building plans. It envisages residents of the future projected 550 homes travelling into the town centre or to the railway station using bicycles rather than their cars as a means of alleviating the threatened further increase in traffic congestion. The lack of any kind of dedicated cycle route alongside – or parallel with – the A1081 appears not to have dampened L&G's cycling-based aspirations.

The people of Harpenden are nevertheless already getting into the cycling habit in increasing numbers, as Liam Jeffries and Will Beale can heartily testify. Liam and Will own the thriving Harpenden Cycles business in Southdown Road, which is seeing more and more new customers coming through their door. Virtually all of them are established car drivers but who are apt to recall the fresh-air and exercise pleasures of cycling in their younger days.

Dads and Mums are also invariably keen to pass on their cycling enthusiasm to their kids. The bewildering variety of different bikes on display in the Southdown shop accordingly includes many 'junior sized' models, right down to the very smallest, aimed at four- or five-year olds.



'Tadpole' mini-bike aimed at two-wheeled toddlers!

viz' colours, as well as padlocks and other anti-theft devices. And of course behind the show area is a well-equipped workshop able to undertake repairs, from simple punctures upwards. As Liam points out, cycling today



Choice of helmet colours to suit every cyclist's fancy

Alongside the bikes on show are a host of accessories and other cycling accoutrements which nowadays necessarily include a range of protective helmets in a variety of 'high

tends to be increasingly more of an off-road activity, partly because of the potential hazards for cyclists of traffic-congested roads. The range of different bicycle types available



Liam Jeffries (left) and business partner Will Beale in front of newly upgraded shop premises

now bears that out, with knobbly-tyred 'mountain bikes' accounting for a substantial percentage of Harpenden Cycles' business. There is also a growing demand, he says, for what have been dubbed 'gravel bikes', effectively hybrid models suited to hard road as well as most loose surfaces.

Harpenden's two old former rail track routes, the Nickey Line and the erstwhile Hatfield-Luton line forming part of the Sustrans National Cycle Network line, both only partially hard-surfaced, exemplify the kind of conditions to which gravel bikes are well suited.

It might be added that Harpenden has historically been fairly well served with bicycle shops. Many years ago a branch of the local Rolt family was the town's go-to bike specialists in premises in the High Street currently occupied by the Twisted Angel cocktail bar. Competition



Bikes, bikes and more bikes on bewildering display

then began to grow with new bike shops opening in Station Road, one calling itself simply Harpenden Cycles, the name which has been carried through different ownerships and locations in the town, until in 1989 it settled on its present site at 115 Southdown Road, next to the Methodist Church.

Liam took over the business in 2014 and Will joined him as a partner in 2019. An indication of their success is their recent investment in an impressive new shop-front which is visually attractive and provides greatly improved security. An eye-catching stylised 'penny farthing' sign above the window serves as a reminder that although cycling is now enjoying a healthy renaissance, its popularity can be dated back to Victorian times.

Did You Know? From Harpenden's history Unearthing Batford's Lea Valley past

Back in 1957, while building of the new Batford council estate was in full swing, a hole being dug, no doubt manually with picks and shovels, suddenly caved in. It revealed an 11ft-deep shaft leading to a tunnel 5ft high and over 20ft long. It was concluded by archaeologists that the excavation had been made by 'chalkers' or 'marlers' (NB: Marl is a 'fine-grained sedimentary rock consisting of clay minerals, calcium carbonate and silt') who in centuries past had mixed in such natural fertilisers to improve the quality of the otherwise poor local Lea Valley soil.

As the years went by and a range of different fertilisers became commercially available to farmers and smallholders in the Harpenden area, those old chalk/marl pits, typically in unmarked places across the rural landscape, were rudimentarily filled in. They became forgotten hazards, not least for plough horses, as well as farm workers, to sink into, 'health and safety' being an undreamt of concern of agricultural life in those days!

From the ford in Coldharbour, close to where the Red Cow pub stands today, the River Lea could be navigated upstream as far as Luton. It formed a boundary between the territories of the Saxons and Danes. The Romans also left traces of their occupation nearby and evidence has been found of first century AD settlements along the banks of the Lea.

A well-preserved clay lamp thought to have been imported by the Romans from Asia Minor in the second century AD was dug up close to the river near Coldharbour, while an Anglo-Roman stone burial chest found near Pickford Mill in 1827 was a sufficiently rare find to be welcomed as an artefact by the British Museum.

Meanwhile, about half a mile away, during the construction of Harpenden East Station for the Great Northern Railway in 1867 (on the site of today's Waveney Road), two bronze bucket handles, deemed to date from the Iron Age, were unearthed, though alas there was no sign of the buckets themselves.



*The original Batford Mill building today
awaits demolition*

Four water mills along the River Lea were mentioned in the Domesday (or Domesday) Book as long ago as 1086, located in the parish of Wheathampstead which then included Harpenden. These are thought to have been at sites along the river where mills were positively established centuries later, at Batford and Pickford within Harpenden's boundaries, as well as at Wheathampstead and, further up river, at East Hyde. A fifth one is recorded between Batford and East Hyde named Bungey but subsequently seems to have disappeared. But who knows, its origins may yet be discovered !

Judy Hamblin

....Batford Mill redevelopment signalled

Two planning applications have been made to SADC for the industrial complex at Batford Mill, fronting the Lower Luton Road directly opposite Lea Springs apartments, including the oldest part, latterly occupied by Superfine Tapes Ltd but now largely derelict, to be redeveloped, mainly for housing.

One scheme (already approved) involves the provision of eight flats and an accompanying passenger lift within a four-storey building. The other project (in a separate application) includes the demolition of an existing industrial unit, to be replaced by 14 new dwellings comprising four three-bedroom and two four-bedroom houses plus two one-bedroom, four two-bedroom and two three-bedroom flats. In addition there would be 1500sq ft of class A1 retail and class D2 'assembly and leisure space'.

EDITOR'S VIEW

Alan Bunting

Don't call us NIMBYs

It will come as no surprise that the Harpenden Society has its critics. Some accuse it of trying to live in the past, based perhaps on our unswerving and unapologetic support for a strengthened Conservation Group, seeking to maintain the character of a town which so many find a desirable place to live.

But our annual Awards scheme is surely convincing proof that new developments – principally new buildings – can be a welcome enhancement to the townscape, provided they are of sufficient architectural merit to complement the Harpenden that is so widely revered.

Outspoken resistance to development proposals which, by common consent, clash brutally with adjacent or nearby properties, is surely understandable in a country town, even though elsewhere – in the City of London for example – the close juxtaposition of the venerated old and the starkly new has in recent decades become not just accepted but is often considered even 'exciting'.

Because Harpenden is not another Luton or another Watford, and fairly justifies the description 'country town', its inhabitants rightly treasure its rural surroundings, much of which has, since soon after the Second World War, enjoyed Green Belt 'protection', against building development on what is largely agricultural farmland.

That protection is now under greater threat than ever before, in the face of current 'Green Belt busting' planning applications or proposals, for four different sites around our town. The largest and most prominent (some would say outrageous) is the 550-home plan from Legal & General on 62 acres of countryside to the north of Bloomfield Road.

But 'waiting in the wings' are three other developers ready, given half a chance, to cover green fields with housing on the south and east sides of Harpenden, at Piper's Lane

(see page 1), Aldwickbury and Cross Lane.

Should L&G be given the green light (no pun intended) it would set a **precedent** – the thin end of a potent wedge – which the other three building companies would not hesitate to invoke in their own planning applications.

The **Harpenden Society** has put forward formal and informal objections to all four would-be Green Belt intrusions, something which has amplified the voices of some of those aforementioned critics, with predictable cries of NIMBY – that is 'Not In My Back Yard'.

It is laid down in Green Belt legislation that planning permission to build on such designated land should be granted 'only in exceptional circumstances'. The universally acknowledged national housing crisis is forwarded by the likes of L&G as justification for building homes on green countryside.

But the proposals for development on the Green Belt around Harpenden do not include dwellings which would be truly – not just theoretically – affordable for first-time buyers (or renters) or others struggling to get on that ethereal 'housing ladder'. They would be more likely to afford, locally, one of the flats proposed at Batford Mill, significantly on a 'brownfield site'. (see page 11).



Hope remains for a Bank Hub

Every effort is continuing to be made to avoid Harpenden being left without a full banking service when and if, as appears likely, Barclays in due course closes its branch. The Town Council has submitted to LINK (the body connecting all the country's ATMs) a full application for a Banking Hub of the kind described in our Autumn 2022 newsletter.

An 'introductory visit' is planned during the next month, reports local banking 'activist' Derek French. He cautions however that, under the terms of the present 'voluntary'

scheme, a Hub cannot be considered until the last bank in town, namely Barclays, has announced its branch closure, even though it services only a minority of the town's banking needs.

Enabling legislation to make Hub provision effectively mandatory has reached its final parliamentary stage, but without an essential clause guaranteeing the 'in-person' counter service to which many older people especially attach great value.

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