



Local Plan back in the Melting Pot?

Despite the impression gained at last October's Harpenden Society's public meeting that revisions to St Albans District Council's Local Plan would ensure its being given the green light by 'independent' (though central government-appointed) examining inspectors, that has proved to be little more than wishful thinking.

Ahead of official scrutiny by the Secretary of State, due in October this year, the council has received notification from the inspectors that SADC, in its redrafted Plan, had not explained its rationale in selecting large areas of Green Belt land for housing development. Those include the 36 acre site alongside the A1081 between Bloomfield Road and Cooters End Lane, Harpenden, with the potential – according to the Plan – to accommodate 580 new homes and the 47 acre site adjoining Batford council estate, where a further 760 dwellings are envisaged.

The inspectors' doubts, by implication raising for a second, if not a third, time the question of the Plan's 'soundness', are expressed in a stricture that SADC should adopt a two-stage approach in proposing 'substantial Green Belt boundary alterations'. They exhort the council to establish 'the scale of unmet (housing) need which could be met only by Green Belt release' and then to determine whether a consequent review of overall Green Belt policy is justified in principle.

This evident reappraisal of the Local Plan's provisions has given new hope to the aspirations of the Lawes Agricultural Trust (Rothamsted Research's parent organisation) to build a large number of homes on 60 acres of land it owns north of Redbourn (see our last Winter newsletter). To the surprise of many, especially LAT, the Local Plan, as it stands, makes no reference at all to the Trust's Redbourn site.

In order to maximise the chances of its intended development being incorporated into a now necessarily re-revised SADC Local Plan, LAT has made a number of important changes to the outline proposals first shown at public exhibitions last November. It says 'the matter is not just about building homes to meet housing numbers; it is about providing an infrastructure for wider social and community needs'.

The number of homes suggested on the Redbourn site is reduced from 1000 to 'up to 825'. A new GP surgery would be included, while the proposed position of a new primary school is now closer to the centre of the housing development, creating 'a focal point in a more

open area'. Meanwhile an increase in the number of vehicle access points is designed to reduce traffic congestion near the school at start and finish times.

More extensive pedestrian and cycle ways would include a link to the Nickey Line crossing the by-pass via an existing Rothamsted Research agricultural underpass. By way of a contribution to nearby public infrastructure, LAT is offering to fund, at the north end of the village and along Harpenden Lane, a dedicated cycleway as well as footpath widening, 'safe crossing points' and street lighting improvements. Contrary to the earlier LAT proposals, Redbourn's existing fire station and library would be retained.

According to LAT chief executive Peter Oxley, 40% – ie about 330 – of the planned homes would be 'truly affordable', though by affordable by whom is, as ever, not specified. Of those homes, he added, over 200 would be offered for rent rather than sale, with local people given priority.

Back at SADC headquarters in St Albans, a reappraisal of the Local Plan was perhaps inevitable given the results of the local elections in May, which saw effective control of the city and district authority being transferred from the Conservatives to the Liberal Democrats. The planning portfolio was accordingly taken from Cllr Mary Maynard (representing Harpenden East) and conferred on Cllr Jamie Day (above - the LibDem representative from Colney Heath).



Nevertheless Cllr Day's initial instinct appeared to be a defence of the Plan as it stands, saying, in response to the independent inspectors, 'we can provide a full justification for selecting a number of broad locations for housing, commercial and infrastructure development'.

But Cllr Maynard, current leader of the Conservatives on the council, clashed with her LibDem planning portfolio successor, demanding to know whether, in response to the inspectors, the number of affordable homes in the district would be increased. Cllr Day replied that he was unable to give a definitive reply until the issue had been further discussed.

Might SADC portfolio changes affect Leisure Centre progress?

It's all change at St Albans District Council following the May elections, and we wait to see if the changes have implications for the completion of Harpenden's new Leisure Centre. LibDem Cllr Robert Donald (Cunningham ward) becomes portfolio holder for 'Property, Commercial and Development', replacing Annie Brewster. As such he oversees development of the Leisure Centre, including the Arts/Cultural 'hub', until the whole complex becomes operational (scheduled for January 2021).



Work has yet to start on converting the existing Sports Centre into the new theatre and cultural 'hub' to replace the existing Harpenden Public Halls and, additionally, incorporate a new Harpenden Museum under the auspices of the town's Local History Society. However, as anyone who has walked through Rothamsted Park in recent months will be all too aware – not least from the sight of a 300 yard long, up-to-20ft-high 'mountain' of excavated soil – work by contractors Willmott Dixon on the construction of the new Sports Centre is well underway.



Rothamsted Park's unsightly 'mountain ridge' of excavated soil with reassurance that the 'mountain' is temporary.

However, at that point, the ongoing management of the new greatly expanded sports centre and the arts/cultural hub (incorporating the 500-seat Eric Morecambe theatre), as well as Rothamsted Park itself, will come within the purview of LibDem (Ashley ward) councillor Anthony Rowlands, now the holder of SADC's 'Community, Leisure and Sport' portfolio.

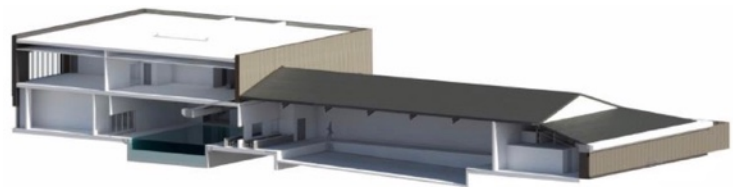


Clearly it will be essential for The Harpenden Society to develop good working relations with Cllrs Donald and Rowlands if we are to influence the manner in which the new leisure complex will be utilised. To that end we have contacted the 'reconstituted' SADC with a view to holding a meeting at which the Society would have the opportunity to offer its support in the most productive manner.

Encouragingly, our approach has been enthusiastically received and it is planned to hold such a meeting with six councillors and council officials towards the end of August, with the Council Chamber at Harpenden Town Hall the suggested venue. Assuming a positive outcome, the Society would then hope to arrange a public meeting where more detailed proposals for the everyday running of the Leisure Centre can be aired.

Whether the theatre 'hub' will indeed be completed and fully functional by January 2021 clearly remains to be seen. There appears some ambiguity about the project's costings. SADC declared at a charette meeting that it did not depend on financial resources raised from the change-of-use (to largely residential) of the existing Public Halls site.

But the council now says that 30% of the cost must be met by income/capital from the Harpenden Halls site, whose replacement by apartment blocks is now deemed an 'enabling development'. From which one can only deduce that the arts/theatre/museum 'hub' will be funded entirely from the Harpenden Halls redevelopment and that, in addition, about £2 million raised from that site will be used to subsidise the new sports facility.



Elevation views of the new Leisure centre and pool areas



A CRICKETING SUMMER CELEBRATION

On the kind of glorious Summer Sunday afternoon which was surely made for the thwack of willow on leather, Harpenden Cricket Club's new pavilion was officially opened by Town Mayor Brian Ellis. He was greeted by the club's chairman for the last five years



Simon Wade and other vital members who have brought the pavilion project to fruition, notably treasurer – and project manager – David Washington, vice-chairman Simon Caunce and club secretary Phil Waters.

Also there to celebrate the opening were Graham Reid, the architect responsible for the design of the attractive new building and Bruce Claridge from the long-established Harpenden company Claridge & Hall which undertook the construction.

The new pavilion with its adjacent practice nets and other facilities proclaims the club's thriving 600-plus membership, supporting Colt and All-Stars young people's teams. Meanwhile plans are in hand to form a new all-ladies team.

Though it retains some of the structure of its 45-year-old predecessor, the pavilion is about 20% larger in floor area and features a new raised viewing balcony and, importantly, new showers, toilets and kitchen facilities. The building's smart new exterior timber cladding meanwhile blends unobtrusively into its sylvan setting on Harpenden Common.



Left to right: Club chairman Simon Wade; vice-chairman Simon Caunce; Bruce Claridge from Claridge & Hall; and architect Graham Reid.

Harpenden Cricket Club claims to be the largest in Hertfordshire as well as the longest established. Its origins can be traced back to 1863. It is confidently expected that the new pavilion will contribute towards the club's ongoing success further into the 21st Century.

Inevitably, raising the money to cover the £250,000 or so cost of the project was challenging, especially, in Simon Wade's words, 'in an environment where grant funding has become increasingly scarce'. He accordingly paid tribute at the opening ceremony to the Harpenden Trust Community Fund for its 'wonderful support', as well as to Harpenden Building Society and Sport England, both of which provided valuable grants.

Banging the drum for a new hospital

National Health Service funding is a major issue nationally. The bogus claim on Boris Johnson's Brexit campaign bus, that the UK sends the EU £350 million per week which could fund the NHS instead, served at least to focus attention on the health service's currently dire financial straits.

At a local level it manifests itself in the wrangles over whether an all-new hospital – most probably sited close to the A414 between St Albans and Hemel Hempstead – is a preferable option to meeting the same needs through an upgrading of existing services at Watford General Hospital.

In his inaugural speech as Prime Minister, Boris Johnson promised 'twenty new hospital upgrades'

West Herts Hospitals NHS Trust has had a spending limit imposed by the Department of Health of £350 million (a familiar figure though not proclaimed on the side of a bus). At the Trust's public meeting in January, the cost of a new hospital was put at £700 - £750 million. But that figure has been challenged by two different campaigning groups, West Herts 21st Century Hospital Solution and The New Hospital Campaign.

Campaigners have commissioned architecture firm BDP Healthcare to prepare plans for a new hospital for West Herts, BDP's £38,000 fees coming from public donations and crowdfunding. Campaign leader Gordon Yearwood maintains that a new hospital would cost less than the Trust claims. He adds that if the Trust gets the £350 million from central government 'it will squander it on piecemeal refurbishment' at Watford, leaving little left for much-wanted improvements which will still be wanted at St Albans and Hemel hospitals.

Red House impasse

Meanwhile, at an even more local level, the likelihood of the Health and Wellbeing Centre planned for the Red House site in Carlton Road, Harpenden, appears as far away as ever, following the major reorganisation of local NHS provision reported in our Spring newsletter. It saw provision of adult community services handed over from Hertfordshire Community Trust (HCT) to a much larger, and arguably more faceless, body, Central London Community Healthcare Trust (CLCH).

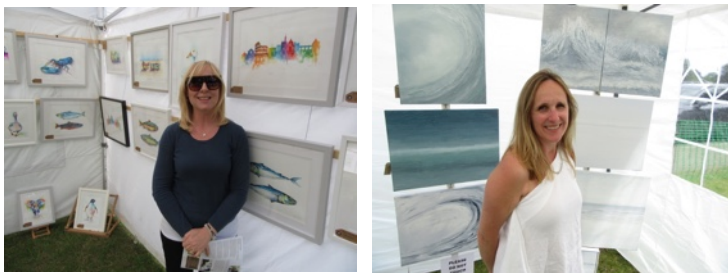
Such is the frustration perhaps even despair felt locally that the Friends of the Red House group, set up to monitor and encourage progress on the project, has been reluctantly wound up. Any remaining funds will be divided between a number of charities in Harpenden and district that are involved in helping the health of residents.

A fine day for a fine and varied artistic show

Stormy weather conditions on the Saturday of the Harpenden Carnival weekend in June caused a last-minute cancellation of the first day of the associated Art on the Common event. But thankfully the wind subsided overnight and the rain clouds kept away, resulting in a perfect Summer's day, so that Sunday's show – at an event which has been held annually for some 30 years – could be held without risk to the canvas gazebos and their all-important contents.

Of the 35 or so exhibitors, about a third were Harpenden based. Their displays included paintings in almost every media, as well as pottery, photography-derived images and other less easily-categorised objets d'art.

Fiona Jackson (below, left), who has lived in Harpenden for 23 years, has been painting for about 12 years, started on water colours but has more recently graduated into oils.



Rachel Bellman (above right), was first prompted to embark on what she calls her 'sea glass art' as a childhood 'beachcomber' on the West coast of Scotland, a good while before she moved to Harpenden some seven years ago.

Paul Johnson (below right), with 40 years as a Harpenden resident under his belt, is one of a trio of artistic photographers who showed their varied collective work under the 'Original Image' name.



Above left Hillary Taylor (left), and Teresa Newham (right), put on a shared display. Hillary, who has lived in Harpenden for over 30 years, specialises in creating what she describes as 'architectural composite townscape' images. Meanwhile Teresa depicts the 'natural world', through watercolour painting and associated print-making and photography.

Sarah Ward (right), who has been in Harpenden for about ten years, produces startling and attractive pictures using a harmonograph, a mechanical apparatus that employs pendulums to create geometric images.



Peter Whitehead (below, left), is a wildlife photographer who, during his 15 years in Harpenden has roamed far and wide in search of stimulating subjects, including visits to the Arctic, the Antarctic and Yellowstone Park in the USA.



Landscapes are the favourite subjects of painter Simon Noakes (above right), a relative newcomer to the area, who showed a selection of his work for the first time at an Art on the Common show.

One of the more unusual forms of artistic creation on display was the 'wirework' shown by Holly Foster (below left). During her three years in Harpenden she has produced a variety of intriguing and attractive objects, including items of jewellery, made primarily from recycled electrical wire.



A first-time showing at Art on the Common for Helen Carew (above right), though she has been a Harpenden-based artist for about nine years. Her oil paintings can best be categorised, she says, as 'abstract expressionism'.

This first-time display was shared by Mary Ng (left) and Cathy George-Samuels. Mary's wide range of inspirational multi-media works, using ink, watercolour and collage, include such unusual base materials as reclaimed wood. Cathy's impressionist, often 'moody' paintings depict subjects from as far away as Japan, Peru and Venice.



Long-time residents of Harpenden and Art on the Common exhibitors (below) Bob and Barbara Kiff showed off their respective artistic creations: Bob's the more unusual, comprising decorative 'bottled lights', and Barbara's flower and landscape paintings.



Harpenden art show regulars (below) Peter Hoare (left) and Adrian Peter exhibited a wide variety of their always impressive wood-turning creations.



Particularly lucky with the weather, lacking gazebo protection from the elements, was Jenny Jackson (below) showing off a representative selection of her wide range of pottery created in her Harpenden back garden studio.



Trust goes eye-catching

The eagle-eyed may have noticed a new splash of colour on the wall of the Harpenden Trust Centre in Southdown Road. The Trust has updated its former logo, to better catch the eye of – and hopefully to register with – a broader section of our community.

Trust chairman Rodger Livesey, pictured with a yellow duster, said: 'It's a bright new logo, and it spells out what we do! We are there to support our community, just as we have done for more than 70 years'. The new logo will grace updated information leaflets, banners and the Trust website which is also being upgraded.

Last year the Trust's care fund supported families and individuals with grants totalling more than £100,000. In addition the Trust's separate community fund makes grants to local voluntary organisations and groups for specific projects, and particularly to those organisations linked to youth, sport, education and the elderly.



Above: Taking down the old sign at the Trust's centre and installing the new sign.

New school opening delayed

Katherine Warington School – set to become Harpenden's fourth secondary school – is due to open its first temporary classrooms (in what will subsequently become its sports hall) in September. But pupils will initially be bussed to the University of Hertfordshire campus's Law Court building at Hatfield because, as head teacher Tony Smith explains, the start of construction last January was delayed by three weeks due to legal issues accessing the site. Those issues are understood to have arisen from the 'Right School, Right Place' campaign which had vehemently opposed the new school being built on the Common Lane site at Batford, those objections eventually being overcome in the courts.

Whether the construction start-up delay will translate into a precise three week delay for the school opening remains to be seen. The school nevertheless declared in May that for the journeys to and from Hatfield three large coaches would be provided to pick-up and drop KWS pupils each school day from Monday September 5 to Friday September 20. The pick-up/drop point will be outside John Lawes School in Manland Way.

As a means of minimising any additional delaying disruption, the plan is for all staff and pupils to go on a three-day residential trip to Camp Wilderness at Knebworth on the school's rescheduled opening day of Monday September 23, with the following Thursday and Friday set aside for staff to get the school ready for pupils to arrive on site for the first time on Monday September 30. Construction of the remaining parts of the school is due for completion in the Summer of 2020.

Construction on the school's sports hall is furthest advanced



Airport wants to stay noisy for five more years

After breaking its conditionally-imposed day and night-time noise limits in the summers of 2017 and 2018, Luton Airport is seeking to avoid such contraventions this year by the expedient of applying for a temporary relaxation of the rules. If granted, it would let the airport authorities off the hook for five years, in the expectation – or hope – that, by 2024, all aircraft flying in and out of Luton will be as quiet as the latest Airbus A320neo type now going into service with easyJet.

Noise limits were set as a planning condition in 2015, when London Luton Airport Operations Ltd was given the go-ahead (by Luton Borough Council, the planning authority which, bizarrely, also owns the airport) to increase capacity to 18 million passengers a year, since when it has spent a reported £160 million on extra boarding gates, multi-storey car parks and other facilities.

The airport says delivery of more modern quieter planes has been slower than expected, 'due to technical and financial issues'. It blames last year's excessively noisy summer nights on the large number of flights arriving late due either to bad weather or air traffic control disruptions caused by strikes at their point of departure.

Also, to make matters worse from a Harpenden perspective, the airport says it has been unable to negotiate a 'respite route' flightpath because airspace south of Luton is clogged with planes climbing out of Heathrow.

St Albans MP Anne Main, on behalf of those suffering Luton-originated aircraft noise, has said 'it's up to the airport to manage passenger numbers to meet the planning condition', rather than varying the condition in order to

meet its passenger growth targets. She adds 'this failure should not be rewarded by relaxing the rules that seek to limit the noise impact on local residents'.

In response to a report on the issue, published by Private Eye, Luton Borough Council insists its functions as a planning authority and the airport owner are 'entirely separate' and 'a decision (on relaxing the noise rules) will be reached based on all material planning considerations and sound judgments'. So, as Private Eye says, with tongue firmly in cheek, 'that's all right then!'



Airport calls for more trains

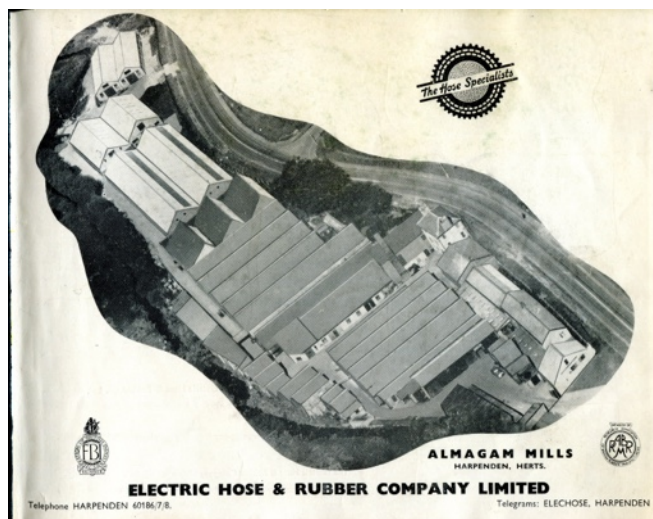
The implications for increased road traffic congestion resulting from the airport's ongoing and future expansion has prompted the airport authorities to call on the government, as part of the re-franchising of the East Midlands rail line, introduce four fast trains per hour between St Pancras and Luton Parkway. Such a service frequency would, it is argued, encourage more airport users to leave their cars at home. However, it has been pointed out by environmental groups that any such development, welcome as it would be, should go hand in hand with the planned Dart fast rail link from Parkway station into the airport terminal.

Did You Know? From Harpenden's history When rubber hoses came from Batford

On the site of the fairly recent new housing at Millstone Way, between the River Lea and the Lower Luton Road at Batford, there stood for nearly 40 years, until 1971, an untidy but industrially important cluster of factory buildings. They were the home of the Electric Hose & Rubber Co Ltd, where once stood one of the river's numerous old water mills.

In 1911 the mill buildings were acquired by a Mr Thomas Warwick and adapted to manufacturing rubber products, notably in later decades for the retreading of tyres, the business being known as Almagam Mills. For many years after, into the 1960s, well beyond its purchase and subsequent expansion by the EHR in 1934, it was referred to by the local population as 'The Almagam'.

The business was established in the UK in 1913 as effectively an offshoot of an American company bearing the same name, based in Wilmington, Delaware, whose president was the splendidly-named Cornelius D Garretson. Frederick Ralph Green, himself an American hailing from New York



State, was the founder of the UK operation, which in its early years was based in London. Its earliest products, comprising mainly rubber hose of different types, were imported from the USA and marketed in Europe.

In 1927 a decision was made to start manufacturing in this country. The result was the establishment of a hose production plant at Watford. However, the economic depression on both sides of the Atlantic, led to the UK company signing a contract with the owners of the British Moulded Hose Co Ltd to market its products. But when that company was sold in 1933 EHR re-entered the business of hose manufacture.

In 1934, the premises and goodwill of the Batford-based Associated Rubber Manufacturers Co Ltd were bought, for what was reckoned to be a bargain price of £8860, for a factory with a floor area of 50,000 sq ft. For many years from that acquisition the Almagam factory was used by EHR to

manufacture, in the words of its sales literature, 'mouldings, mechanicals and ply and suction hose'.

On the outbreak of war in September 1939, the decision was made to move the London-based staff to the Harpenden site. An important wartime military contract for EHR was for the production and supply of woven cotton and wire reinforced rubber hosing required for the inflation of barrage balloons.

In January 1942, Arthur Moore, a native of the north of England, became general manager. His drive and energy were said to have reinvigorated the business with the development of new and competitive products. Following the end of hostilities, new machinery and additional buildings on the Batford site enabled EHR to expand and modernise. Another Harpenden-based company (dating from 1927), the Holdtight Clip & Coupling Co Ltd, became an EHR associate.

Frederick Green died in 1948, aged 87 and overwhelming death duties threatened the future of the company as a privately-owned business. But it came through without having to 'go public' and in the early 1950s, with Arthur Moore still at the management helm, expansion went ahead. During the six years following Mr Green's death, some 20,000 sq ft of factory area was added.

Mr Moore was forced to retire through ill health in October 1959, after 60 years spent in the rubber and associated industry. Frederick Green's son-in-law Donald Taylor took the reins. He faced tough challenges in the face of ever increasing price competition, brought about in part by worldwide overcapacity in rubber product manufacturing.

Following Mr Moore's retirement through ill health, EHR's viability became dependent on increased mechanisation. New equipment was acquired in the early 1960s to speed up production and 'ease the burden of increasing labour costs' – in plainer language, to shed personnel.

In 1971, EHR's long-standing connection with Harpenden sadly came to an end, when its manufacturing operations returned after 40-odd years to the Watford area. After the company vacated the Batford site nearly 50 years ago it became a multi-occupation industrial estate.

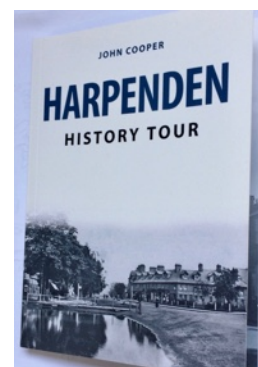
Acknowledgement: Harpenden Local History Society

'Village' history in pictures

Anyone interested in Harpenden's history could do worse than acquire the latest book from local author John Cooper. Entitled '**Harpenden History Tour**', it comprises, after a brief but informative introduction, fifty historical photographic images of the 'village', captured mainly during the first half of the 20th Century, by photographers working primarily for picture postcard publishers.

Each picture is accompanied by a short descriptive text – much more than a mere caption.

Subjects range from Rothamsted Manor, the Glen Eagle Hotel, Anscombe's department store and the Old Cock Inn, to Harpenden East station and the Skew Bridge. The book costs £7.99 and is available from **Harpenden Books**.



EDITOR'S VIEW

Alan Bunting

LibDem planning influence looming?



This newsletter, like the Harpenden Society itself, always does its best to steer clear of politics. We've no axe to grind. On Brexit, let members decide for themselves. Nevertheless, as neutral bystanders, we cannot help but take note of the St Albans District Council upheavals resulting from the local elections in May.

Ten new councillors were elected, the net effect being to transfer effective control of SADC activities from the Conservatives to the Liberal Democrats. It has meant important portfolios – ie responsibilities – changing hands, with LibDems taking over.

As our front page story indicates, the council's Local Plan (LP), already subjected to repeated redrafting over the last couple of years, is now 'up in the air' once again, with Green Belt related issues at the heart of a heated argument in the council chamber between LibDem councillor Jamie Day, the new planning portfolio holder and his Conservative predecessor Cllr Mary Maynard.

New questions are being asked, most notably by central government appointed examining inspectors, as to why areas of Green Belt, including the two large sites on the edge of Harpenden, need to be sacrificed. It seems clear from Cllr Day's observations on the subject that he too wants answers to those questions.

A no less important issue for the people of Harpenden is the ongoing status of the town's Neighbourhood Plan (NP), approved by a citizen's referendum vote last year. Though it was acknowledged that the NP does not have the legislative authority of the district LP, we were assured that SADC, in considering planning applications in Harpenden, would be 'obliged' to take note of the NP's recommendations.

Harpenden Town Council (HTC), supporter if not instigator of the NP, remains under Conservative control. As such it largely, let us say tacitly, approved the provisions of the LP in its last drafted form, as presented by Cllr Maynard to a Harpenden Society public meeting last October. We await to see whether that hitherto implied political harmony between SADC and HTC can be maintained against the 'background of the two authorities' different political colours.

Meanwhile the latest further LP 'disturbance', seen as likely to force yet another redraft, is being seized upon by the Lawes Trust to have its proposal to build 825 homes (reduced from 1000 initially) on its land north of Redbourn, incorporated in the Plan. If the proposal were given the go-ahead, would it ease the necessity to build on those two Harpenden Green Belt sites? Certainly from a 'NIMBY' perspective it would be nice to think so.

Cutting out plastic

Environmentally-concerned Society members keen to reduce the amount of plastic waste which blights many parts of our town, and to conserve the planet's finite resources – mainly oil – which go into the manufacture of plastic products, will welcome the formation of a new campaigning group:

Plastic Free Harpenden

Heading up the movement is Natalie Edwards, a Harpenden mother and grandmother, who says she welcomes any suggestions or help in building momentum for the campaign, with its ultimate target of doing away with single-use plastic locally. She adds that PFH is focusing its efforts via defined working groups: businesses; schools; community spaces (churches, public halls etc); communications; and events.

More information from
plasticfreeharpenden@gmail.com



SOCIETY PUBLIC MEETING DATES

'Modern Architecture in an Historic City'

with Geraint M John

President of St. Albans Civic Society

September 25

7.30 for 8pm

Harpenden Public Halls

Further dates and speakers are yet to be confirmed,
check our web site for details
www.harpendensociety.org

Please send comments on articles or any other issues raised in this edition to the editor: Alan Bunting
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Visit the Society's website –
www.harpendensociety.org

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