



LITTLE VICTORIES

Christmas came early for The Harpenden Society when, within a few days in autumn, two announcements were made which raised realistic hopes that two objectives for which The Society had been campaigning for over two years might come to fruition.

A New Beginning for The Red House



'A vibrant hub for people to manage their health and wellbeing' is how the business plan describes its vision for transforming the Harpenden Memorial Hospital site. The Herts Community NHS Trust has issued its plan Developing a Health and Wellbeing Campus at Harpenden Memorial Hospital – Integrating Health and Social Care, an ambitious programme to offer the town a range of clinical and treatment services in a welcoming setting, alongside partnership with a charity or other health agency – MENCAP is one likely possibility – who would fund and run a residential care component on the site. This project, likely to be one of the biggest public service ventures of its kind in Harpenden, could be started as early as 2016.

The Red House Forum is the ginger group established by The Society and by County Councillor Teresa Heritage, who has played a major role in this campaign. With members from both professional ranks and local opinion, it has been to the forefront in campaigning...

A New Initiative in Secondary Education



Rather more controversially, The Harpenden Society welcomed the Herts County Council plan for a new secondary school to be built on the Lower Luton Road. Chris Marsden, our chairman, following a vigorous committee discussion, sent to County Councillor David Williams, who has been in the van of promoting the new school, a resounding message of support. 'We see this', he claimed, 'as a positive result of our work with the Harpenden Parents Group and others alongside the powerful efforts of local councillors.' His request that The Society be included in future discussions about encouraging 'the school to become a key part of the local community' has been met with a pleasing affirmative reply from county councillors.

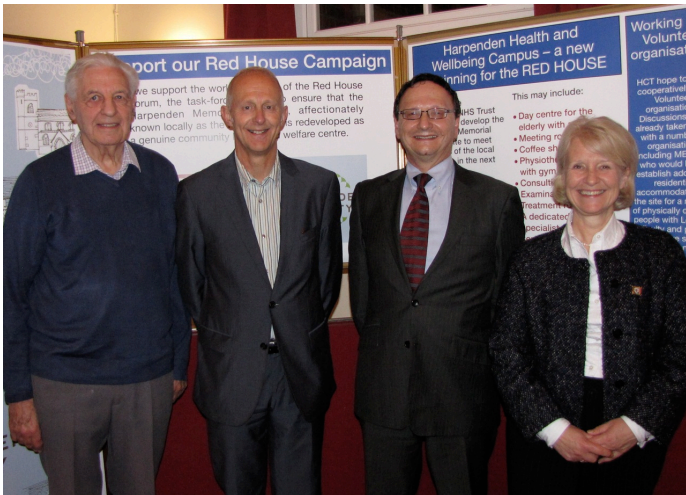
For two years The Society's Education and Leisure Working Group, in concert with the 400- strong Harpenden Parents Group, has campaigned for new schools in Harpenden. We were heartened to find that the figures supplied by the county demographers were much the same as those calculated by the Harpenden Parents...

Articles continued

A New Beginning for The Red House

...ranks and local opinion, it has been to the forefront in campaigning for this outcome and will stay in business as a local monitor of the scheme. The business plan includes a paragraph that reads:

'The people living in Harpenden are extremely interested in the provision of healthcare for the future in Harpenden, none more so than the 'Red House Forum'...The group has been actively seeking a solution for Harpenden Memorial Hospital...This Forum is an effective working group to provide public oversight of the redevelopment of Harpenden Memorial Hospital and will be able to provide a public 'sense check' during the development.'



Above left to right. Eric Midwinter, The Harpenden Society; David Law, chief executive of the Herts Community NHS Trust; Mark Carman project manager, County Councillor Teresa Heritage, co-organiser of the Red House Forum with Eric Midwinter

On Thursday 24 October The Society's public meeting was addressed by David Law, Chief Executive of the Herts Community NHS Trust, with Mark Carman, Project Manager for the plan, also much involved. A packed Park Hall, with almost as many standing as sitting, listened intently and appreciatively to this clear-cut outline and responded with concise, useful questions.

A New Initiative in Secondary Education

...Group analysts. Peaking in 2019 the shortfall in secondary school places means that Harpenden is critically in need of a fourth secondary school, recruiting six classes of about thirty children for each year, some 1260 in total.



Above. Colleagues from the Harpenden Parents Group shared The Harpenden Society stand at Harpenden's Discovery Day in June 2012

How perilous it would be to try to second-guess or reject this once-in-a-generation proposal. One of the first messages of support we received was from a mightily relieved parent with children at the Lea Primary School:

'Really great news about the secondary school – it is without doubt that The Harpenden Society and the Harpenden Parents Group have played a key role in getting to this position.'

The Society has taken a strong line in the ongoing discussion by stressing the need to begin a public conversation about what sort of school is required, how it should be integrated into the local community and whether, for example, it should develop specialisms like the other three secondary schools in the town. This approach has been broadly welcomed. Eric Midwinter, education spokesman for The Society said, 'it is imperative that the new school gets off to a flying start, enjoying proper parity with the other schools. It must be fourth equal, not fourth best.'

There is plenty of work to do before these two fine schemes become reality but, at least, we have momentum and may look positively ahead. Please go to our website where you will find guides to on-line petitions calling for support for both the Red House and the new school plan.

The Harpenden in Question

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

11. Campaign to Protect Urban England



A life-long, non-driving train traveller, I recently tested on a two hour journey from London to Chester a phenomenon I had remarked on over some seventy years.

The countryside is empty.

I watched carefully on both sides of the train as it sped northwards. Just one incident broke the spell. About ten minutes outside of Chester I spotted a woman with two dogs. Apart from the two stopping stations on route, this was the only human being I saw outside the train. Admittedly, much of what I did see was rather unattractive tracts of industrialised agriculture but vast expanses are desolate and unused with little evidence of the countless hordes who supposedly dote on the countryside.

The statistics bear this out. There is a kind of conspiratorial game played which tries, by setting 'urban' against 'rural', to imply they are somehow of equal weight. However, in human terms, a massive majority of the people is crushed into a tiny fraction of the land. Using the fairly high government norm of a settlement population of 10,000, the UK's urban population is 79% rising to 88% if the yardstick is the more sensible 2,000 marker. Put another way, the World Bank figures for 2012 suggested that the rural population of the UK was just 10.1%.

However, it is when the density of urban development is measured that the myth is genuinely confounded. 500 experts examined the national landscape for a major UK National Eco-system Assessment in 2012. In a detailed scrutiny of buildings, roads, railways, paths, car parks etc, they came to the conclusion that only '6.8% of the UK's land area is now classified as urban'. But they also found that 54% of urban districts are, thankfully, 'green space', for example, parks, sports pitches, allotments; 18% is domestic gardens and 6.6% waterways, lakes and reservoirs – and a good thing, too. Thus, they further concluded that '78.6% of urban area is designated natural rather than built'...and that...'the proportion of the English landscape that is built upon is 2.27%'.

So much for the countryside being, as we often hear, 'concreted over'.

In effect, roughly 90% of a rising population is crammed into a small proportion of the available land. It is the towns that are overcrowded not the countryside. The Campaign To Protect Rural England is right to protest against what they calculate to be 150,000 houses planned to be built on green belt – but perhaps right for the wrong reasons. It is because the towns have neither the infrastructure nor the space for infrastructure to service heavy housing development. Harpenden is critically and desperately in need of new schools and is forced to build on green belt as there is no option – and that dilemma is apparent everywhere across the nation. CPRE argue that 1.5m houses could be built on brown field sites, that is, in towns, further raising the pressure on over-used services and local employment opportunities. Once more it is the urban environs that have to take the pressure. Any over-crowding, any resultant social deprivation, seems permissible as long as the countryside is not 'despoiled'.

Surely the huge urban majority could be spared less than one per cent of this vast and under-utilised wilderness, the reality behind the mock-aesthetic dream of a pseudo-Victorian pastoral idyll. Here 50 well-designed 21st century, eco-friendly, attractive new towns might be developed to house up to 2.5m people, with one major bonus a respite for the imbalanced and cramped towns in which so many of us live.

It really is time to Campaign To Protect Urban England

Eric Midwinter

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

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Visit the Society's website –
www.harpendensociety.org

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Out and About with The Harpenden Society

The Society has had a further ceremony for its much-valued awards for environmental improvement and has laid out its stall at a couple of Public Hall events and a presentation at STRADA.

The Harpenden Society Awards 2012 Presentation Sept 26



Top left: Valentina Rizzo of STRADA receiving a Letter of Commendation from The Harpenden Society chairman Chris Marsden. Above: Town Mayor Rosemary Farmer receiving a Certificate of Merit on behalf of Harpenden Town Council. Left: Penny Kitching a tenant at Harpenden Mencap's Pine Court receiving a Certificate of Merit from Chris Marsden with Anthony Steele - far left (The HS Awards organiser); Andy Butterfield, Manager of Pine Court Barbara Ouston (HS Membership Sec) Karen Stafford, Mencap Director. Patrick Fisher, Trustee; and Ron Taylor (HS Publicity Manager)

International Older People's Day Oct 1



Photo far left: Donald Robertson and Eric Midwinter staff the Red House Forum/Harpenden Society stall. Left: a welcome to Alan Cox, organiser of the event, Chairman of the Harpenden Seniors Forum – and a member of the Red House Forum.

Davenport House Patient Group Health Fair. Sept 28



Photos above from left to right: Rosemary Farmer, the Town Mayor; Dr. Chas Thenuwara chatting to Mark Carman, Project Manager of the Red House development plan; and David Clarke – record-breaking visually impaired international footballer, who opened the event, all visiting the Red House Forum/Harpenden Society stall.

Memos to and from Members

Hue and Cry

By our roving crime correspondent.

David Lloyd, the Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire, visited Park Hall on 26th September to address members of the Society and the public. He said our police do a good job, but victims of crime get lost in the system, and he described his efforts to put victims at the heart of what he is doing.

He surprised us by saying that Harpenden, and indeed Hertfordshire, has a low crime rate and a high conviction rate, though that is not a good reason for leaving our doors unlocked. He is endeavouring to make big budget cuts on our behalf without jeopardising the effectiveness of the police.

He also described his efforts to involve the community with policing, through volunteers such as Neighbourhood Watch and Catch a Speeder.



Above left: Alan Jackson, The Society's Public Order spokesman with David Lloyd Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire.

Mission Statement for Members

The purpose of The Society is as 'a non-political voice promoting the well-being of the town, as critical friend and watchdog over those providing public, voluntary and commercial services.' This purpose is enshrined in our legal status as a registered charity. The Chairman and Committee are, in legal terms, the 'trustees', obligated to ensuring that we keep to this remit. The Society, of course, relies heavily on a strong membership for its financial and general support and engagement, not least through its opportunity to criticise the 'trustees' at the AGM and, if it feels like it, to elect new ones.

What it is not is a charity providing a direct service to its members or representing its members' personal views. It is not, in that regard, like a political party or faith organisation and it might be illicit in charity law for the Committee to so proceed.

We make this statement because recently one or two members have seemed to have misunderstood The Society's legitimate role. This appears to happen when issues are raised which, as is often the case, are controversial. Opinion is then divided – the Committee finds itself divided at times on some matters. Then the Committee has to come to a majority decision and its members, largely speaking, accept that collective decision. However, its legally binding task is to arrive at what in good faith is its view of what would be best for Harpenden as a whole and to promote that view forcibly.

Our hope is that usually the majority of members will agree with such decisions but more important than that is the hope that the majority of people in Harpenden will think likewise. You, as members, are our key supporters, we are happy to consult you and hear your views and it would be impossible to function without a membership. Thank you for that support. Without the thousand or so members who back us so generously the Committee would not be able to work for the benefit of the thirty thousand townsfolk – and, of course, their thousands of descendants - we truly and legally exist to help.

Letters to the editor

Our autumn issue's concentration on traffic and parking problems attracted several comments from readers, all chiefly joining the cries of misery about permanent on-street and also on-pavement parking, including examples of cars and vans parked with all four wheels on the pavement, so that the pedestrian, maybe a mother pushing a pram, has to go on the road.

Here is just one example from an evidently sportive member:

Dear Editor,

I am writing to say how much I enjoy the Harpenden Society Newsletter. Not only does it keep me informed

about all that is going on in my local community, and how the Harpenden Society is working to improve it, it is also a thoroughly entertaining read.. I particularly enjoy the more thought provoking articles that can be guaranteed to challenge perceived wisdom and frequently include something that provides a talking point with family and friends.

What more could you ask for? Keep up the good work. I for one fully appreciate a publication that, rather than simply reports the business of the Society, tackles the big issues in such a vibrant and insightful way -

Goal-scoring Machine of Harpenden

Power to the People over Power

Passing mention was made in these columns recently to the government initiative that urged local authorities and community groups to engage in collective purchasing of energy. **'Collective Switching'**, as it is known, involves consumers making negotiating jointly for group deals with their electricity and gas suppliers. With one in five households now officially suffering from 'fuel poverty' and bills rising all the time, these schemes have gained significantly in traction since being introduced, with local councils taking a lead.

150 councils have now adopted the initiative and 285,000 households have benefited. The average annual savings for these homes has been £125. This represents a 10% saving on the average British dual-fuel bill. This must be a welcome boost to household budgeting.

A nod's as good as a wink...just a gentle hint that maybe such a scheme might find appreciative support in Harpenden.

Some communities have gone beyond collective purchasing. They have actually become involved in the production and ownership of local energy and some think-tanks argue that sustainable solutions to the energy problem are only possible with this degree of consumer participation. The usage of wind turbines, whatever their merits, has provided opportunities in this direction, with consumer co-operatives popping up all over the place, from Oxfordshire to Stirlingshire, and bringing savings and other benefits to communities.

One step at a time, though...but **'Collective Switching'** seems worth a thought. Should the Town Council and/or The Harpenden Society be having that thought?

Subscriptions

This is the proper juncture to inform members that the Committee has decided, in the face of rising costs and the amount of campaigning work

The Society is undertaking, to raise the annual subscription to the by no means extortionate sum of £8.00 for an individual or £10.00 for a family or household.

This is the first increase since 1996.

Members who pay annually by cheque or cash will find in this edition a membership renewal form which we would encourage you to complete as soon as possible. Subscriptions and forms should be returned to the Assistant Treasurer Harry Downie at 66 Eastmoor Park, Harpenden, Herts AL5 1BW

Operation Scorpion

Alan Jackson, The Society's Public Order spokesman, has more advice to offer, bravely gathered, as you will read, at first hand.

The incidence of domestic break-ins in North Harpenden is currently unacceptably high compared to the incidence of such crimes elsewhere in the St Albans District. 'Operation Scorpion' is one of the responses of the Police to this situation. Unmarked cars are actively patrolling the area at night (when Alan recently confronted a suspicious car at night it turned out to be part of this operation...) 'Operation Scorpion' is Hertfordshire's initiative to drive down serious acquisitive crime by relentlessly pursuing criminals and bringing them to justice.

Your Library Needs You

The Society are keen to help the library service by providing volunteers to ensure the library is open on Wednesday afternoon and early evening. If you feel you might be able to assist, please visit our website for further details.



Society Meetings in 2014

At the time of going to press, here are the dates and titles.

Thursday 30 January 2014 –

when the topic will be **'Transport in Harpenden; What's Going On'** a discussion of many of the transport issues affecting Harpenden, in conjunction with the Harpenden Highways and Transport Forum.

Thursday 27 February 2014 –

when the topic will be **'Harpenden: the Over-development Threat'** a vital scrutiny of major housing plans for the town, possibly on the green belt and at the likely risk of infrastructural overload. (please watch out for/check location and/or date of this meeting nearer the time, as a larger venue may need to be booked)

Make a Note in your Diaries for

Wednesday March 26th

At Rothamsted Research -times to be confirmed
'CELEBRATION 2014'

when we shall celebrate the year's work in style, hold our brief annual general meeting, enjoy the winning entries in our annual schools competition and generally have a good time.