

New MP calls for ‘strategic, not ad hoc’ planning



Addressing an audience of over 100 of his constituents at a packed September meeting of the Harpenden Society, 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.

He cited the failure of St Albans District Council (SADC) to consult with neighbouring authority Dacorum in formulating its Strategic Local Plan, suggesting that in shaping the future of Harpenden there should be more ‘inter authority’ collaboration, especially between Hertfordshire County Council, SADC and the Town Council. That was needed most crucially, he said, if supporting infrastructure – roads, schools (HCC responsibilities) and even medical services – was to be given due priority at the same time that developers’ major planning applications for new housing were being ruled upon by SADC.

There was no question, said Mr Afolami, that more housing in and around Harpenden was needed. But if there was to be any chance for those young people growing up in the town being able to afford a new home without moving away, the housing mix had to include 2/3-bedroom flats and houses – with supporting infrastructure. If the matter was not confronted then the prospect of a town which was more than just a ‘dormitory’, somewhere where people could work and live, in what felt like a real community, would be in jeopardy.

It was a view reinforced by a meeting he had attended at the Building Research Establishment at Garston, reviewing the future of Hertfordshire as a county, where he had been impressed with the proclaimed axiom of ‘let’s

keep people local’, including the self-employed.

His perception of Harpenden as ‘a small town which feels like a village’ was, he felt sure, shared by its residents and by visitors. And he was keen to ensure it stayed that way. A visit to Hammonds End Farm, escorted by the farmer Stuart Roberts, had given him a feeling of Harpenden’s traditional and attractive rural setting which, he said, needed to be retained.

In a lively Q+A session following his introductory remarks, Mr Afolami agreed that a growth in Harpenden’s population (from around 34,000 currently) was inevitable, with a 10% increase possible in the next decade. While such growth might not be unreservedly welcomed, he cautioned that any criticism or protest directed at the planning authorities should be constructive. He said it should be remembered by protesters, for example, that small – typically local – builders were often ‘more sensitive’ to residents’ concerns about environmental issues than larger developers based outside the area.

In response to a complaint from David Rankin, chairman of Harpenden Green Belt Association (HGBA), that SADC planners regarded building development in Harpenden as being less important than in St Albans itself, Mr Afolami pledged ‘to stand up for’ his constituency, being ready and willing to debate Harpenden’s particular Green Belt issues with the Secretary of State. That would include, in order to meet St Albans District’s now increased housing target, the possibility of ‘densifying’ development in and around the city centre, by ‘building upwards’.

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He nevertheless emphasised his good working relationship with St Albans MP Anne Main, where they hoped to engage pro-actively in the preparation of the SADC's revised Local Plan. On a separate issue, they were collaborating to address the question of noise disturbance from aircraft flying into and out of Luton Airport.

He added that he recognised the concern of HGBA and others that the green space between Luton and Harpenden's northern boundary should not be eroded, with the implications for greatly worsened traffic congestion on the A1081 a vital secondary issue. Mr Afolami's view was that 'there should be no coalescence across the Hertfordshire-Bedfordshire border between Harpenden and Luton', to which end constructive liaison between SADC and Central Bedfordshire DC planners was essential.

It was clear that Harpenden's tough car parking challenges were fully recognised by the town's new MP, and he pledged support for the idea of double-deck parking at the railway station. Having had meetings with Thameslink, he said 'it looks doable and I hope it's not impossible'. There was enough architectural expertise available, said Mr Afolami, to avoid such a two-level car park being as ugly (as described by a questioner) as the station footbridge erected a few years ago.



Bim Afolami with Society chairman Philip Waters

More immediate good news for commuters, which had emerged from his meetings with Thameslink, was that new trains, many with twelve instead of eight carriages, would bring a 20% increase in capacity over the next 18 months.

Without being drawn too specifically on his Brexit views, Mr Afolami said that, at a local level, he would press for Rothamsted Research to have continuing access to the single European market, and for the numerous non-British EU citizens working at Rothamsted to retain their jobs there. **THS**

New secondary school declares its high aspirations

Following on from the unveiling of the building and site plans for Harpenden's new secondary school – reported in our Autumn newsletter – more of the Katherine Warington School's 'educational aspirations', under head teacher designate Tony Smith, (below) were revealed at a 'public consultation event' in mid-September.



There the Harpenden Secondary Education Trust declared the KWS aim of delivering a 'traditional but flexible and innovative curriculum, preparing students to thrive in a changing world'. Under the heading of 'Compassion,

Aspiration and Support', the school will, say the governors, 'commit to providing high quality special needs education and resources for those who require extra support' under the supervision of 'an experienced Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator'. They add however, that 'an active accelerated learning programme will stretch and challenge the most able'.

Behaviour in its widest sense is the subject of particular focus in the new school's declared aspirations, with an affirmation that 'the highest standards and expectations for adults and students alike' will be set, and that 'good behaviour is essential for productive learning and in developing young people to become responsible and valued members of the local and wider community'.

There is a further assertion that 'the school will focus on developing positive learner dispositions to support achievement', and to that end a traditional school uniform 'will be worn with pride'. Staff will, say the governors, 'work tirelessly to help students become well-rounded, positive and responsible members of society', with a healthy attitude to challenge.

Good behaviour will be rewarded, they add, underpinned by a focus 'to remedy, restore and reintegrate students who make poor choices', while the school 'will ensure that all its students gain essential life skills that a modern complex society demands, if a young person is to live a happy and productive life and achieve social, emotional and economic well-being'. An ethos will be fostered that 'nothing is impossible if it will enhance learners' life chances'

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Recognising that competition is an essential part of a child's development, a traditional House system is planned for KWS, to provide an element of friendly competition and collective pride in achievement and success. Accordingly, a wide range of activities and opportunities – from sports to academic and creative arenas – will aim to stretch and challenge students as part of a larger team.

Under the heading of 'Peer Interaction', a range of inter-year and inter-school (with existing Harpenden secondaries) activities is envisaged, notably in the musical field, where budding jazz, orchestra and vocal musicians can participate in collaborative events. A chess club and a debating society are just two of the extra-curricular activities in prospect.

Academically, KWS students will, at Year 8 (typically around aged 13), select up to nine GCSE subjects to study through Years 9, 10 and 11, while, at A Level, a choice of subjects will be offered 'suitable for further education, apprenticeship and subsequent employment'. Each day there will be six 50-minute lessons (Monday to Thursday) and five on Friday.

In the interests of 'curriculum aspiration', the school's science, technology, engineering and maths departments will be located adjacent to each other, providing what is claimed to be 'an exciting, dynamic and inspiring environment, utilising the latest technology'. Specialist software will be used to enhance learning in CAD/CAM design (aligned to laser cutting and 3D printing, music programming, art, photography and computer studies).

As an indication of the intention to embrace new technology to best advantage, KWS students will not be

deterred from bringing their hand-held electronic devices to school, so that every student in – perhaps surprisingly to an older generation – every lesson 'has the ability to use the internet to enhance their learning'.

However, it will be a teacher decision when and if to embrace web access, and use of devices will not be permitted outside the classroom during the school day. Furthermore, 'filtering systems will prevent students accessing non-learning social media sites during school hours'.

Due importance is to be given at KWS to 'pastoral care', adopting the experience and best practice already followed at Roundwood Park, Sir John Lawes and St George's, to ensure every child is part of 'a caring and supportive community'. The governors affirm that 'no child will be left out or left behind', to which end the school will 'build strong supportive links with families'.

Acknowledging that a successful school builds partnerships and trust with families and carers, due emphasis in the KWS aspirational plans is given to relationships between the school and parents as well as with the wider community, providing the opportunity to help shape each child's education.

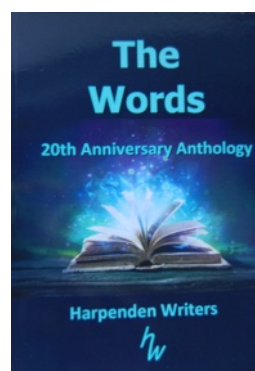
KWS will begin recruiting staff from February 2018, the first three appointments likely to be Heads of English, Maths and Science. The school will become a member of the Alban Teaching School Alliance, an alliance of 12 local secondary schools working together to promote staff recruitment and development. THS

Anthology celebrates Harpenden Writers' 20 years

The Harpenden Writers group celebrated its 20th anniversary in early November with the launch of its second anthology of poetry and prose. Attended by over fifty group members and visitors at the town's Quaker Meeting House, the event included readings by thirteen of the 25 authors from the Harpenden area who have, between them, provided 56 literary contributions to the 132-page volume, entitled simply *'The Words'*.

Guest of honour was Harpenden's Town Mayor Rosemary Farmer, who was invited to cut the celebratory 'book like' cake after congratulating Harpenden Writers chairman Stephen Lloyd on what she said was clearly a thriving group of creative – albeit mainly amateur – poets and authors.

Over 130 copies of the new anthology have already been sold. The book is available from local retailers: Harpenden Books and Serena Hart, price £6.50, or direct from HW members, price £5.50, at www.harpendenwriters.com, tel: 01582 760564.



Harpenden Mayor Rosemary Farmer cuts the 'book cake'. Harpenden Writers' new anthology 'The Words'

SADC's Local Plan brought up to date

At the Harpenden Society's well-attended October meeting, the planning portfolio holder on St Albans District Council Mary Maynard provided an update on preparation of the council's revised Local Plan (LP). The word 'Strategic' has now been dropped following the rejection of the earlier draft by the Planning Inspectorate, due to SADC's 'lack of engagement' with adjacent authorities, notably Dacorum to the west.



Cllr Maynard (above), who in May took over the lead planning role from Cllr Julian Daly, explained that a government-approved Local Plan was needed if definitive planning decisions were to be made locally. Without it, they would be made by officials in London with little or no knowledge or sensitivity about the St Albans area.

Crucially, she said, plans for housing needed to take account of demographic changes in recent decades. From 1981 to 2015, for example, the number of households in the UK had risen from 20 to 27 million, of which one-person occupancy had gone up from 20 to 29%.

Housebuilding had fallen by around 40% during that period, to about 150,000 per annum nationally, helping to push up prices by an average of 7% each year. It had pushed home ownership for young people progressively and dishearteningly out of reach.

For them, she said, 'affordability has largely gone away, thereby killing incentive'. As a result, in the 25 to 34 age group, home ownership nationally had dropped from around 60% in 1981 to only 30% in 2013/14. In demographic contrast, more than ever of the over-65s now owned their homes.

The revised LP, now integrated with what was previously referred to as the Detailed Local Plan (DLP) – the latter not to be confused with Harpenden's own Neighbourhood Plan was designed to cover SADC's planning strategy over the period 2020 to 2036. The aim was to have the LP finalised for submission to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) by March 2019.

Under the heading of the council's 'duty to co-operate', planning authorities in the area, notably SADC, Welwyn Hatfield, Dacorum and Central Bedfordshire, were, said Cllr Maynard, obliged, under government ruling, to liaise with each other in meeting the whole area's housing need. That would involve fresh consultations and a new 'call for (housing development) sites'.

The LP needed to deliver employment as well as housing need and also supporting infrastructure. Many in the Harpenden Society audience were cautiously gratified to hear Cllr Maynard say that 'protected green belt' also needed to be delivered, though her assertion was notably lacking in specifics. And she added, perhaps ominously, that 'government will, where necessary, trigger policy responses ensuring that further land comes forward'.

Determination of housing need (numbers and categories) was subject to a revised 'methodology' being set by the DCLG, which was due to come into force for LPs (necessarily including SADC's) submitted after March 2018. Cllr Maynard acknowledged that 'housing need' in St Albans District, within the LP's terms of reference, should include no big houses with 4+ bedrooms.



Nevertheless, applying the new DCLG-mandated methodology more than doubled the total of new homes required to be built – compared with former SLP numbers – from 450 to 913 per annum. That implied a total increase from 9000 to 14,500 homes to be built in the district in the new LP's 16-year time frame. And in apparent denial of the previously-mentioned need for 'delivering green belt protection', 9500 of those would need to be built on green belt land.

But, in a sign of equivocation in Whitehall, Cllr Maynard spelled out the 'Government Green Belt Approach' as follows: Authorities should amend green belt boundaries only when they can demonstrate that they have examined fully all other reasonable options. Those options included making effective use of suitable brownfield sites, densification (locally, in Harpenden and St Albans town centres) and exploring whether adjacent authorities' land could help to meet the requirement. That last option, which Cllr Maynard likened to 'a game of musical chairs, where the players carry their chairs round with them', was clearly the stumbling block over which the former SLP was rejected.

Within the scope of the government-decreed methodology on determining housing need, were 'opportunities to improve' – deemed to include a minimum percentage of affordable housing for locally-based 'key workers' and for older people wanting to downsize. In that context Cllr Maynard said SADC was talking to housing associations about the requirement for new social housing, though care was being taken to safeguard its ongoing affordability – something which, in Harpenden, could be positively ensured only on the Westfield allotment site where the land was council owned. **THS**

Red House site plans revealed

Detailed plans for extensive redevelopment of the Harpenden Memorial Hospital site in Carlton Road were put on display in October, fleshing out the initial proposals reported in our Summer 2016 Newsletter. At the exhibition, held in the original (listed) Red House building – whose structure is due to be retained – comments from interested parties were invited by Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust representatives.

A target date of April 2019 has been set for completion. Under the proposals a substantial area of the site will be sold for private housing development, in order to raise a large part of the funding necessary to pay for the adjacent Health and Wellbeing Centre, or 'Community Hub', projected to replace and augment the present NHS services provided at the Red House. Without such private housing, the scheme would not be viable, says the Trust.

The new-build housing development proposal is concentrated on the north of the site, adjacent to Maldon Court, on the east and west sides of the Red House itself. It would provide 26 homes, comprising nine two-, three- and four-bedroom 'town' houses, as well as a block of 17 one- and two-bedroom apartments. In addition the Red House building itself would be modernised for conversion to residential use, comprising eight 1- and 2-bedroom apartments and one 3-bedroom house.

Ongoing and expanded healthcare services on the redeveloped site will be provided in the new centre under NHS Trust auspices, in partnership with Luton and Dunstable Hospital. It will be housed in a refurbished and considerably extended existing building which until recently comprised 'The Stewarts' assessment and treatment unit for old people's mental health services.



Specialist adult medical services planned for the centre include care and treatment for: diabetes; bladder and bowel issues; heart failure; Parkinson's; retinal screening; and chiropody, plus physiotherapy and midwifery services. Included under the heading of Children's Services will be speech and language therapy and baby and post-natal clinics.

Broader 'Community Wellbeing' issues will be addressed through the new centre, via the provision of yoga and pilates classes and weight management sessions. It is also intended to provide a contact point for local welfare organisations such as Harpenden Helping Hand and Seniors Forum. **THS**

AWARDS 2017

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 the sections below by **March 12th 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

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

Did You Know? From Harpenden's history No trouble brewing

In Victorian times, before a mains water supply was widespread, it was acknowledged, from a health standpoint, to be safer to drink beer than 'Adams Ale', the latter typically drawn from a well. Babies were accordingly often weaned on porter, the ale with the lowest alcohol content.

That did not stop vehement preaching against the 'demon drink' by Christian extremists, for whom total abstinence was the true doctrine. Young people were urged to 'sign the pledge', even though many could not have comprehended what the issue was all about.

Among those advocates of teetotalism, the Methodists were notably ardent in their convictions. Methodism, originally comprising the separate Wesleyan and Primitive non-conformist branches, has deep roots in Harpenden. It remains a strong force today, befitting the prominent position of High Street Methodist Church in the heart of the town.

The Methodist view of alcohol consumption is arguably somewhat more relaxed today than it was back in 1930, when 'High Street' – as it's affectionately known by church members in and around Harpenden – was built. But 87 years ago, the choice of site for the new church carried a certain irony which could even be seen as triumphalism.

That was because the church was built on the site of the last of the village's two breweries, whose products would have been almost universally eschewed by those attending the new place of worship.

For much of the 19th century there were two breweries side by side in the High Street. Together they stretched from the site of today's public library to where Sainsbury's is now. Much of the site of the southern brewery, known as the 'White House' and latterly owned by Glover & Sons Ltd, was replaced in 1930 by the Methodist Church. Its neighbour – and competitor – was Peacock House, replaced as long ago as 1871, by Brewery House, a shop with accommodation above, occupied in 2017 by W H Smith and Mountain Warehouse.



In this historic but immediately-recognisable view of the Vaughan Road corner, the tower of the southern brewery looms over the bank and shops in Lower High Street.

As early as 1837 there is evidence of a brewery in the High Street, owned along with several 'tied' pubs in the area, by a James Curtis. But in 1853 the brewery was sold to the Healey family, who were brewers in Watford. George Healey came to live in the White House and to manage the brewery, employing twelve men and a boy. He died the following year but his widow Elizabeth ran the business for another twelve years, before leasing it in 1874 to a Benjamin Bennett, who was already running a small brewery in Dunstable. He evidently also owned the Plough and Harrow at Southdown, because his 'BB' monogram can still be seen on the front of the building.

As an aside, during a particularly bad storm in 1879 the Lower High Street flooded to such a depth that John Healey was allegedly able to swim 'from the brewery to the end of

the pond on the common and back'. In 1893, the brewery was sold to Mrs Martha Mardall, together with 18 public houses (including the Railway Hotel – now the Harpenden Arms), for £16,000.

The (northern) Peacock brewery, so named because it had a peacock weather vane and topiary hedges, was founded in about 1826 by one James Kingston. The next owners, the House family, in their turn put it up for sale again in 1870, when it

was described thus: 'a valuable freehold and copyhold property, the Brewery, desirably situated at Harpenden, near to the railway station, with malt and hop stores, tun rooms, underground cellars, stabling, residence, with spacious and well stocked garden, and two closes of meadow land, containing nearly three acres, together with the fixed plant and machinery in excellent condition'.

The Brewery was 'abundantly supplied with water of an unusually pure quality from an artesian well on the premises; also twelve public and beer houses in the surrounding area'. (The Silver Cup beer house, with stabling and workshops, was offered as a separate lot.) The brewery was bought by James Mardall – Martha's husband. In 1871, he demolished Peacock House, and had Brewery House built on its site.

Records show there were 31 pubs in Harpenden in 1900, of which 21 have survived into the 21st Century. A local brewery price list from 1882 shows a 9-gallon barrel of 'best stock ale' at 15 shillings, but 'porter' at only 9 shillings. Bottled IPA (India Pale Ale) was priced at 4 shillings for a dozen pint bottles, though with 2 shillings returnable for the 'empties'.

**Acknowledgement: (information and image) :
Harpenden Local History Society THS**

EDITOR'S VIEW

Alan Bunting

Is our Council Tax being spent efficiently?

Revenue generated by Council Tax should be spent on benefitting the community. It's a statement of the obvious but which, in the context of 'real life', merits closer consideration.

We are entitled to know where our money goes. And the 2000 Freedom Of Information Act is accordingly designed to ensure transparency in matters which include public spending. All credit then to the Herts Advertiser and its reporter Fraser Whieldon in using FOI provisions to uncover details of recent expenditure by St Albans District Council (SADC).

In particular, the investigation has revealed the extent of fees paid to outside consultants in respect of major public sector planning proposals, not least those affecting Harpenden. Perhaps most notably, in 2016/17, SADC paid consultants £257,610 in relation to the proposed new arts and leisure complex in Rothamsted Park. They were hired to organise the design 'charette' public meetings where residents could have their say on the plans.

Richard Shwe, SADC's chief executive (commercial and development), told the Herts Ad 'we hired a facilitator to organise the design charette for the Harpenden sport and arts centre to ensure the process was run independently of the council'. He added that 'there are procedures in place to ensure value for money, such as tendering and a scrutiny committee which examines our spending'.

Outside consultants were also tasked with advising SADC on preparing the initial – subsequently aborted – Strategic Local Plan and, it is reasonable to suppose, its 'Mark 2' Local Plan successor. But the council was unable or unwilling to answer Herts Ad enquiries regarding the fees expended.

How many of the Harpenden residents who attended those charade - sorry, charette – meetings would regard that mind-blowing quarter of a million pound cost as good value for money? It's a rhetorical question but one that inevitably brings to mind other and unquestionably urgent needs of public finance, stymied through council budget shortfalls.

For instance, leaving aside the fact that highways are a Herts CC rather than an SADC responsibility, it's nevertheless worth contemplating how many thousand potholes in the district's roads that are crying out for repair could be properly dealt with if the budget for such work received a £250,000 cash injection.

As well as the unforeseen second wave of costs associated with the revision of SADC's Local Plan – estimated by some of those close to the programme as around £1 million – we Council Tax payers are having to support the subservient Neighbourhood Plan. I use the word 'subservient' advisedly.

At the risk of repeating some of the observations made in the summer newsletter's EDITOR'S VIEW, nearly all the aspirations set out in the Neighbourhood Plan (NP), most obviously on planning issues, however well intentioned, can be realised only with the 'legislative consent' of SADC, as framed in its yet-to-be finalised Local Plan.

It has been argued, quite legitimately, that the statutory requirement for SADC to re-draft the Local Plan gives



Harpenden a greater opportunity to promote the NP as a means of, hopefully, influencing some of the detail in the definitive LP, by highlighting issues of most concern to the town's residents.



Harpenden's aesthetically-impressive Neighbourhood Plan document.

Should the extent of that influence be determined by visual presentation, then the recently-launched Harpenden NP is off to a flying start. The full-colour printed 70-page A4 wire-bound document, with its glossy transparent pvc cover and eye-catching artwork, is aesthetically impressive. Whether its extremely detailed content is correspondingly impressive, in terms of the NP's likely effect on the future of the town, is perhaps more debatable. Some have described it as a 'wish list', many of whose wishes could only be granted in a world protected from hard financial reality.

The likely first reaction of many hard-pressed Harpenden Council Tax payers on receiving the lavishly-produced Neighbourhood Plan document is to question whether its production is yet another example of unduly profligate local government expenditure. THS

SOCIETY PUBLIC MEETING DATES
7th December 8.00pm at Park Hall ,
The Harpenden Public Halls - Past & Future
25th Jan. 2018, 8.00pm at Park Hall
Air Quality - a concern for all of us

Check our web site for details
www.harpendensociety.org

Summer colours recalled

On winter's dark evenings and with a tendency for spirits to accompany temperatures in a downward direction, it can be heartening to look back on the glorious summer floral displays of Harpenden in Bloom. The scheme has been organised by the town council for the past two decades and has helped to further enhance Harpenden's attractive 'green' character.

There are plantings in October as well as in May, ensuring that the flower beds adorning the town centre's precious green spaces retain their attraction all year round, tended by gardening contractor John O'Conner Grounds Maintenance.

For 2017 they were sponsored by 15 local businesses and organisations, including The Harpenden Society. THS



St Nicholas Lodge – Harpenden Freemasons



Hawk Interiors



Lyndhurst Financial Management



BPH Wealth Management



Thorns – in Memory of Colin Moxley



M J Taylor King



Skye Optometrists



Inner Wheel



The Harpenden Society



The Two Wheel Centre

Please send comments on any of the articles or 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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