



Society opposes huge airport expansion - unequivocally

Proposals for yet further expansion of Luton Airport, increasing its capacity by nearly 80%, from 18 million to 32 million passengers per annum (ppa), have been met with vigorous resistance from many quarters including, notably, Hertfordshire County Council. Most recently vehement objections to the plans were also voiced by Hitchin and Harpenden MP Bim Afolami at the Election Hustings in December at Rothamsted Research's Fowden Hall, sponsored by the Harpenden Society. The Society's own formal – and no less fervent – opposing response, on behalf of our almost 1000 members, has been submitted to London Luton Airport Ltd on the 19-page 'Feedback Form' accompanying LLAL's main 166-page glossy consultation document entitled 'Future LuToN (sic) - Making best use of our runway'.

Bim Afolami's clearly-expressed opposition to the airport expansion plans takes on a new and important – dare we say hopeful – significance, because the projected capacity growth, of more than 10 million ppa, is a development defined as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) under the 2008 Planning Act. As such it is subject to a central government Development Consent Order (DCO). It means that, unlike previous Luton Airport expansions, the ultimate go-ahead can only be sanctioned by the Secretary of State for Transport, not just by Luton Borough Council, the airport's owner, which remains, bizarrely, the local planning authority.

The Harpenden Society's detailed feedback response to the latest airport expansion proposals reflects the fact that most of our members have experienced one or more of the detrimental factors that demand at best a halt or at worst a major revision of the plans. But it is

the 'uncivilised' noise from aircraft flying in and out of Luton both day and night which, for people living in Harpenden, is the most disturbing, as can be seen from the AMR maps showing the frequency of registered noise complaints. The projected growth in the number of flights would only exacerbate the current disturbance, to an extent that could not possibly be outweighed – as implied in the LLAL proposals – by the introduction of allegedly quieter planes.

In the context of Luton Airport generated noise, readers should perhaps be reminded of the report in our Summer 2019 newsletter, which pointed out that noise limits were set in 2015 as a planning condition of the airport's expansion to 18mppa capacity, but that the limits were broken in the summers of 2017 and 2018, prompting an application for a 'temporary' relaxation of the rules, letting the airport off the hook for five years in the hope that all aircraft flying in and out of Luton by 2024 will be as quiet as easyJet's latest A320neo type.

The lengthy noise-control breach, now in its third year, and LLAL's vague promises in its consultation document that it is 'expected that cargo carriers (operating often at night, which historically have used mainly older, noisier planes) will move to quieter aircraft over time', are of little comfort to those regularly disturbed by such flights now.

Hopes that noise disturbance for Harpenden residents would be ameliorated, through steeper climbing take-offs in combination with revised flightpaths, remain largely unfulfilled because of ongoing air traffic control restrictions related to congested airspace north of London, mainly caused by planes climbing out of Heathrow.

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London Luton Airport Ltd
A Luton Council company

Future LuToN
Making best use of our runway
Public consultation – 16 October to 16 December 2019

About this project
Future LuToN is our proposal for making best use of the existing runway at London Luton Airport (LTN). We are proposing to do this by constructing a new terminal and associated infrastructure to increase the capacity of the airport, in terms of the number of flights and passengers it can handle.

We need to increase the capacity of our airport to help meet the demand for air travel in the UK. The current permitted capacity of LTN is 18 million passengers per year, and we are seeking to increase this to 32 million passengers per year by 2039.

This is the second public consultation on our proposed expansion of the airport. Our latest proposals have been shaped by the feedback we received from our previous consultation in summer 2018.

Taking part in our consultation
We are proud of the economic and community benefits that the airport brings to our whole region, and we look forward to discussing our proposed development with you and listening to your views. This is your

opportunity to comment on our proposals before we prepare and submit a Development Consent Order application to the government, to authorise the proposed development. We aim to submit our application in 2020.

We will be holding 34 consultation events across the region during October, November, and December, where you can speak to the project team, ask questions, and provide feedback. All the documents associated with this consultation will also be available online on our website, futureluton.llal.org.uk, and at document inspection venues at council offices and libraries across the region. The back page of this booklet describes the various ways that you can send your feedback to us.

For more information about our proposals, please see the Guide to Statutory Consultation available on our website, futureluton.llal.org.uk, at our consultation events, and in document inspection venues.

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A different kind of concern, but no less important for those living in and around Harpenden, is that of access for airline passengers to and from a greatly expanded Luton Airport. Already, at times of peak flying activity, especially around holiday weekends, road traffic queues on the main approach road 'back up' beyond the taxiway underpass, with knock-on effects creating congestion not only to and from the M1 but along minor roads, notably the Lower Luton Road from Batford and Wheathampstead. In short, the road network can hardly cope now. A determined campaign to persuade passengers to get to and from the airport by public transport – incentivised by the forthcoming DART cable-car link from Luton Parkway station – might meet with some success, but car use is sure to remain doggedly high.

That is because, in reality, the seductive temptation of putting the luggage in the car and driving to the airport will surely remain all powerful, with prohibitive parking charges the likely main deterrent. Worse still, as now, environmentally, will be to have someone else – a friend or a taxi driver – drive you, thereby undertaking TWO return trips, generating extra pollution as well as road congestion. LLAL's estimate of a negligible increase in road mileage from a near-80% growth in passenger numbers, through airport users leaving their cars at home and switching to public transport, is hopelessly optimistic.

In any case, as Harpenden Society chairman Phil Waters points out in our formal response, the scheme proposals don't cover the 'true' cost. Attracting huge additional numbers of passengers to the airport needs massive improvements to rail and other public transport infrastructure. Those costs are largely and conveniently ignored in the LLAL consultation document. It remains typical of many big developments, in both the public and private sector, which do not pick up the cost of the things that really need to be done. Someone else is expected to pick up the tab!

All those projected additional flights and the accompanying growth in road traffic movements would bring corresponding increases in pollutant and – separately – carbon dioxide (global warming) emissions, from aircraft and from vehicle exhausts. Jet engines and the petrol and diesel engines in the many cars, buses and trucks in the environs of the airport in the coming years will, thanks to advancing technology, individually get progressively 'cleaner' and more fuel efficient – but not to an extent that would anywhere near compensate for LLAL's hoped-for growth in numbers.

Though the latest consultation is necessarily directed at communities within a prescribed radius of Luton Airport, the effect of its proposed expansion of operations would be more widely relevant – in fact as far widely as it could be, that is globally. Greenhouse gas emissions (principally carbon dioxide – CO₂), contributing directly to harmful global warming and climate change, would rise in proportion to the amount of fuel burnt by the greatly increased number of

aircraft using the airport as well as the many more road vehicles in the vicinity.

In the view of the Harpenden Society, the LLAL consultation document is disgracefully misleading, in the context of climate change, by effectively ignoring the planned huge increase in flight numbers. Not until page 113 of the document is the crucial issue raised and then effectively dismissed in a few paragraphs which, conveniently but shamefully, tries to offload responsibility for Luton Airport's expected damaging increase in CO₂ aviation emissions on to the failure of world governments to establish 'global emissions reduction frameworks through the International Civil Aviation Organisation'. It adds, by way of an excuse, that 'until this has been done, an allowance (not quantified) for carbon emissions from the aviation sector will be included in the UK's carbon budgets'.

There is no acknowledgement by LLAL that as other carbon sources are reduced (eg as 'renewables' replace fossil fuels), aviation will become one of, if not the, major contributor to global carbon output – possibly up to 25% of the total by 2050. Measures listed in the consultation document from sources other than aircraft, which are intended to 'offset' the inevitably massive projected increase in aircraft emissions at Luton, nevertheless occupy far more column-inches, but are, even so, derisory.



Offsetting the additional aviation-generated carbon by planting trees to replace vegetation lost in the airport expansion seems like a ploy to divert attention from the cause and anyway would require unacceptable areas of good agricultural land to have any real effect. Likewise those relatively trivial aspirations, such as 'encouraging the use of electric vehicles on the airfield'.

Those behind the planned expansion should acknowledge their communal – indeed humanitarian – responsibility and realise that slowing or even reversing aviation's headlong growth may have to be considered if the harmful effects of global warming on future generations are to be averted.

The separate issue of the effects of more numerous flights on local air quality – increasing the amounts of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), carbon particles, sulphur dioxide and other pollutants – is dealt with in the LLAL consultation document with the assertion that NO₂ levels in particular close to the airport are currently ‘below the limits set out in legislation for the protection of human health’. However, the claim is rather contradicted by a report published in December in the journal Environmental Research Letters and picked up by the national press, which names Luton as ‘the UK’s air pollution capital’ in an analysis of air quality in 146 of the country’s most densely populated areas.

While admitting that most airport-generated climate change and pollutant emissions are from air traffic (rather than from land-based airfield activity), LLAL says ‘but we have no control over that’ clearly implying that the huge issue is beyond its responsibility. But any airport that facilitates a major increase in emissions is ultimately, along with the airlines, culpable.

Suggestions that the proposed airport expansion would benefit the country’s economy should be treated with some scepticism. Some 80% of Luton’s passenger throughput comes from the leisure business, typically people going on holiday. Flying mainly to destinations abroad, they spend their UK-earned money to the detriment of Britain’s balance of payments, adding to what has been described as our ‘tourism deficit’, estimated to be some £18 billion annually.

An enlarged airport handling more flights and more passengers would inevitably generate increased employment. LLAL’s consultants have clearly sought to optimise the number of jobs created and duly portrayed as an economic benefit. However, the methodology by which an additional 300 jobs would arise, for every million ppa increase, deserves to be challenged. It looks like a statistician’s equivalent of ‘creative accounting’ with, for example, a courier company employee making a delivery to the airport being counted as an additional job.



Harpenden Society members are inclined to instinctively support Herts County Council’s strongly-expressed objections to further Luton Airport expansion. Such instincts are likely to be reinforced by LLAL’s reference to a sizeable piece of Hertfordshire to the east of the current site, to be allegedly designated for the creation of ‘wildflower meadows’, additional

‘public open space’ and currently cropped ‘habitat creation etc’ areas.

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But by implication that (currently agricultural) land could be used for future further airport expansion, notwithstanding the terrain which falls away steeply beyond the eastern end of the runway. A longer runway, though not referred to specifically, must be more than a gleam in the eyes of the LLAL planners, something which would potentially allow larger-capacity twin-aisle planes to take off and land.

That possibility is of considerable concern. We would accordingly expect Herts CC and North Herts District Council to put in place some form of legal covenant to block any such LLAL encroachment across the county boundary. However, we realise that, given the airport’s unscrupulous ongoing breach of one of the noise control planning conditions, it would likely strive to find a way of having such a restriction waived.

More generally, we think it impossible, in LLAL’s words, ‘to integrate the airport with its surroundings’ (by implication harmoniously) due to the overall ‘urbanising’ effect of the expansion bringing, for north Harpenden residents especially, its intrusive lighting and ground-testing noise, as well, of course, as the all-pervading departure/overflight noise. Should the expansion be given the green light, it would further erode the sense of Harpenden being a ‘town in the country’.

The Harpenden Society’s deposition on the proposed further expansion of Luton Airport, enabling it to handle 14 million more passengers a year, is to register unequivocal opposition.

REMINDER!

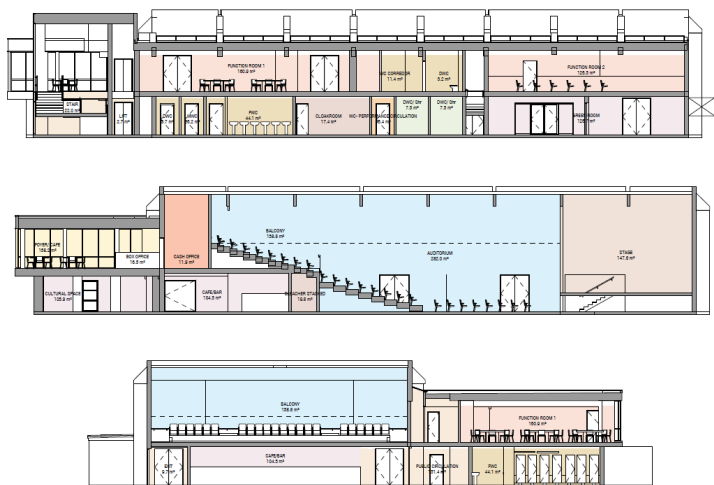
2020 Harpenden Society subscriptions are now due. Members paying (£8 single, £10 couple) other than by Standing Order should send their remittances please to the **Treasurer, 66 Eastmoor Park, Harpenden AL5 1BW**. Please notify any change of address or contact details to membership@harpendensociety.org

Would-be Culture Centre users voice their concerns



Everything is on schedule for Harpenden's new 'Cultural Centre' in Rothamsted Park to be ready in January 2021, according to Barry Cronin, St Albans District Council's project manager, when he chaired the inaugural meeting in early November of the future centre's nascent 'user group'. The group comprised over 30 representatives of disparate organisations in the fields of music, drama and other entertainment, as well as the town's local history society which is due to establish a long-awaited Harpenden Museum within the centre.

Conversion of the large hall of the former sports centre into the cultural centre's planned 511-seat theatre auditorium was already well advanced, reported Cronin, though construction work on the supporting function rooms, entrance foyer and the café/bar area had yet to start.



The official name of the impressive new facility had yet to be finalised, although a Powerpoint artist's impression of the building's frontage shown at the meeting clearly bore the name '**Harpenden Cultural Centre**'. Early indications that its auditorium would be named '**The Eric Morecambe Theatre**' had likewise yet to be confirmed.

Features of the theatre complex not embodied in earlier outline proposals include a stage which could be dismantled and stored. Together with the retractable 'concertinaed' lower seating, it would maximise the available level-floor area, to create a hall able to accommodate multiple stalls at a Craft Fair for example, or a standing-room-only event of up to 700 people. The floor itself would be suitable for dancing, but probably not tap-dancing.

However, should a major attraction pack the venue near to capacity, concern was expressed about the number and accessibility of planned emergency exits, including those from the upper floor. Cronin hastened to assure potential users that the plans fully met statutory fire and emergency regulations.

There were repeated calls at the user group meeting for the new cultural centre to be viewed as much more than a mere 'replacement' for today's Public Halls. Cronin accordingly pledged to ensure the new centre's broadened appeal. It was confirmed that 1life, the company (headquartered in Cambridgeshire) which has for some years run the Public Halls, was due to take over the new cultural centre operation – something which itself engendered less than whole-hearted confidence among some of those at the meeting who had day-to-day contact with Public Halls personnel where, it was alleged, the venue's smooth operation was not helped by all-too-frequent staff turnover.



Glenn Povey

Barry Cronin

Glenn Povey, general manager of 1Life, said plans were in place to market the new facility extensively, through local press coverage and local radio. He said the company would be investing heavily in additional personnel and a programme of staff training. But there was criticism from attendees at the meeting that no thought had seemingly yet been given to the recruitment of any kind of overseeing arts administrator.

It was thought essential that schools in Harpenden – notably through the town's Secondary School Trust – should be invited to get involved in planning possible events at the centre. Likewise all arts groups should be approached, whether or not they were current Public Halls users.

Inclusion of different-sized function rooms/studios, as well as the large theatre/hall space, was widely welcomed at the user group meeting, especially by amateur dramatics representatives who pointed out the need to provide for smaller productions. They expressed some apprehensions however about hiring costs, in particular when compared with today's equivalent Public Hall charges. In response, Povey said the cultural centre operation would of course have to be viable, but the pricing structure would typically be based on 'market rate' charges for Friday evening and weekend events, to some extent effectively subsidising weekday bookings.

It was hoped to welcome back Harpenden Musicale after its departure from the Public Halls through lack of a suitable space. Another key aspiration was to revive Harpenden's aspirations for local cinema-going. Harpenden Film Society had been effectively disbanded because of the indifferent facilities – uncomfortable seating and poor sound reproduction – in the large Public Hall. It was pointed out that, however attractive the new centre in its cinema role, a professional – literally or otherwise – administrative organisation was needed to develop a rolling film programme, with accompanying publicity to ensure viable audience numbers.

As an adjunct to its conventional function as a feature film-showing cinema, it was suggested that the new Harpenden venue could join the growing circuit of live (or recorded) video relay showings of performances – typically concerts or operas – from elsewhere in the country or even further afield.

There were assurances from Cronin and Povey that acoustically, the new venue, as either a theatre or a cinema, would meet the highest standards for audiences' enjoyment and, in answer to a question from a concerned resident of the adjacent 23a Leyton Road apartment block, would be more than adequately sound insulated.

In response to a question about on-site catering, it was explained that space constraints within the shell of the erstwhile sports centre building had prevented the inclusion of a 'fully functional' kitchen. But the idea of a shop, presumably selling confectionery in particular,

integrated with the box office and/or the café, was mooted, possibly using the café wall space for periodic art displays. It was acknowledged however that the feasibility of the shop idea was dependent on the centre's opening hours. A further suggestion was that of a Culture Centre loyalty card as a financial incentive to attract regular patrons to theatrical events.

It was recognised by 1Life and by SADC's project team that, when compared with today's Public Halls, the new centre's much less visually prominent location, 'tucked away' in Rothamsted Park, had to be addressed, not only with imaginative signage, but with suitably vigorous publicity, especially for what had to be a 'grand opening'. A valuable contribution to that local publicity should be a high-profile Public Halls 'closure event', ideas for the nature of which would be welcomed. Such an event could perhaps be spread over a week, with a celebratory Gang Show a possibility.

Thought ought also to be given well in advance to the 'ribbon cutting' opening ceremony at the new Culture Centre, most obviously undertaken by a star name 'celebrity', who would necessarily need to be booked months ahead.

As one of the organisations represented on the newly-formed Culture Centre user group, the Harpenden Society is pledged to do everything it can to ensure the new venue is as successful as it deserves to be. Over the next year, as members of the user group we intend to maintain a role as 'the eyes and ears' of the local community.

AWARDS 2019

This year we are hoping to cast our net wider in inviting nominations for the Society's now well-established Awards Scheme.

We are welcoming votes from anyone in Harpenden, not just Society members. So please ask friends and neighbours in the town to let us know of any new building developments or facilities being completed during 2019 that are worthy of recognition.

Go to the Society web site to nominate your entries by March 31st:

www.harpendensociety.org

OR email to awards@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.

CATEGORIES for 2019

The Harpenden Society Plaque

A Harpenden Society Certificate of Merit

A Letter of Commendation

Refreshing the Lydekker pond

Lydekker Park and, in particular, the pond on its northern boundary, are being made more attractive to visitors, and to those living nearby, in a refurbishment programme which is now largely completed. In the last two or three years the pond had become clogged with unwelcome invasive vegetation which not only detracted from its visual attraction; it had also deterred visiting ducks, moorhens and coots, whose presence were always a delight, especially to families walking through the park – a haven of relative tranquility only yards away from the persistent whoosh of traffic along Luton Road.

Funded by Harpenden Town Council with support from the National Lottery Community Fund, the work on the pond involved installing new, more readily repairable, linings 'redefining' the pond edges – ie the banks – in the interests of safety. An important new feature is a 'decking pier', enabling wheelchair users in particular to get a better view of the pond and its surrounding non-invasive plantings. Meanwhile the area of Lydekker Park around the southern end of the pond has been seeded to create what HTC describes as a 'wild flower meadow'.



Bim's local parliamentary perspective

In a face-to-face interview with Ron Taylor, this newsletter's associate editor, Hitchin and Harpenden MP Bim Afolami declared himself all too aware of the major issues concerning his Harpenden constituents. High on the agenda were Luton Airport's plans to expand its operations over the next twenty years, to 32 million ppa (passengers per annum), by adding 80,000 more flights a year, generating a probable 28 million passenger journeys to and from the airport, of which only a maximum 45% would be by public transport – the remaining 55% arriving or leaving in their own cars.

'There should be no further expansion of Luton Airport whatsoever', declared Bim. On specific airport-related issues, he agreed with many Harpenden residents that 'current noise levels are intolerable'. Furthermore he said 'guarantees (from the airport's management) to reduce noise levels have been ignored', adding that 'they just don't care'.

Air pollution (from aircraft and from airport-generated road traffic) was, said Bim, another vital concern, pointing out that 'high levels of particles are already in evidence around the whole area, causing health concerns'. A connected issue was that of traffic; Bim said he recognised that 'local roads and the M1 junction 10A motorway link are already subject to congestion, but no expansion of the road network is planned – and if there was this would remove valuable farmland'.

Rail services, vital to the area for the many Harpenden residents commuting into London every day, as well as – currently and potentially – for Luton Airport passengers, came in for unbridled criticism. 'No reliance', said Bim, 'can be expected from Govia Thameslink to expand services which (like the Bedford to St Pancras line) are only north-south. I have held meetings with GTR; they refuse to accept critical issues. They are not fit to hold the franchise'.

He acknowledged that St Albans District Council was pushing Thameslink to improve the service for Harpenden passengers and praised local pressure groups for their 'constant action'. But, he said, 'with three groups controlling the railways – GTR, Network Rail and the Government – there is no single accountability'. Unfortunately, he added, 'we will have to wait for the report from the Williams Review (see Rail Delivery Group website) to see what can be done for the future of rail travel'.

Turning to more Harpenden town centre specific issues, Bim said he recognised that 'retaining a mixed High Street is essential for maintaining a thriving local community, without which Harpenden would become a boring commuter town'. The next government 'could (though not would!); he said, help by including new legislation in its first budget'.

It was recognised however that Harpenden residents have Luton and St Albans shopping centres close by as well as the on-line shopping option. Hitchin, the other large town in Bim's constituency, manages, he said, 'to attract more local

shoppers, thanks in no small measure to the Hitchin Business Improvement District (BID) scheme set up in 2009'.

A business-funded initiative, possibly setting an example for Harpenden, it is supported by North Herts District Council and aims to deliver improvements to the town centre that businesses themselves have identified as key to improving the trading environment. The Hitchin BID scheme's 'Town Centre Rangers' act as its eyes and ears, liaising with police and statutory services to ensure a clean, safe and secure environment. Recycling, street deep cleaning, Christmas Lights, events and marketing, car park promotions, snow clearance, training and business support are all part of the town's BID portfolio.



Bim Afolami with interlocutor Ron Taylor

A literally burning issue for the people of Harpenden is the proposal by Emsrayne for a large industrial incinerator on the Lower Luton Road at New Mill End, which has met almost universal opposition. In Bim's words, 'the development of this project so close to Harpenden is a bad idea. Given the level of protest over the past year or more, there seems to be a distinct possibility that the planning application will not proceed. However, I have been working with the main opposition group SHLI and, should the need arise, I will rejoin their efforts. Meanwhile, residents should keep a check on any progress, and be ready to renew their objections to Emsrayne's actions'.

Bim said he was monitoring Harpenden's Red House health and wellbeing centre project, saying that 'having checked the background on this project, I am dismayed by the ongoing delays, but I have now heard from the NHS project team and they are looking to bring forward the opening date ahead of (the indicated) 2023'.

Broader environmental questions were, said Bim, assuming ever greater importance, locally as well as nationally and globally. 'Educating schoolchildren about such issues in Harpenden has been an objective of mine with involvement at both Roundwood Park and St George's schools. Biodiversity is another subject I have been campaigning about. Two local chalkstreams, notably the River Ver, have far too much water extracted by Affinity Water; I will be pressing for this to be significantly reduced'.

Historical vacancy

Harpenden Local History Society is looking for a General Secretary, someone with some spare time which they could put to good and interesting use, in maintaining society records as well as, for example, dealing with questions – often from non-members – about Harpenden's rich heritage. If you want to know more about what's involved, contact society chairman Gavin Ross at gavros.ross@bopenworld.com or on Harpenden 715399.

Did You Know? From Harpenden's history 'A WELCOMBE REMINDER OF YESTERYEAR'

After a lengthy refurbishment from its role as the Harpenden House Hotel, the venerable and imposing Welcombe House, on the edge of Harpenden Common, has reverted to its original private residence status, albeit now converted into spacious (up to 2340sq ft) and luxurious (up to £2.7 million asking price) apartments. It forms part of the Fairview Homes development on the extensive Southdown Road site, the remainder of which comprises new-build houses and apartments.

The building's Grade II* listing imposed restrictions on what could be done to the structure. Some of the internal alterations have proved controversial within the terms of those restrictions, though there is general agreement that the outside appearance remains essentially unaltered, apart from a general 'smartening up'.

Very little is known about the origins and early owners of Welcombe, with its imposing, but oddly asymmetrical early 18th Century three-storey façade. But it is likely that its handsome doorway and 'broken segmented pediment' of 1710-20, (to quote Pevsner's 1953 book on Hertfordshire architecture), and imposing central entry hall and staircase, were part of a wing added to a 17th Century timber-framed house.

Some timber beams and walling of an earlier structure were still evident in the kitchen quarters when the building was refurbished in the mid-1970s. The house probably originally faced south, maybe with a courtyard overlooking the gardens. It is thought to be contemporaneous with the earlier parts of Bennetts (now the home of the Royal British Legion), on the other side of the common in Leyton Road. In the 18th Century a new wing was added on the south-east corner behind the 1720s frontage – something apparent from an obvious join in the brickwork.

In 1930 Welcombe became a convent of the 700-year-old Dominican Order, and for the next 34 years the building remained essentially unchanged, though in 1936 Lourdes Hall was built in the grounds, followed much later, in 1964, by St Dominic's Roman Catholic School. But at that juncture Welcombe's acquisition by Moat House Hotels led to many internal alternations, notably altering walls and doorways on the ground floor, inserting mock ionic columns in Adam-style and re-configuring late 19th Century rooms as a long 'Georgian' dining room giving access to a new single-storey extension. On the upper floors, plasterboard false ceilings and partitions were added to create bedrooms and passageways.

Acknowledgement: Harpenden Local History Society



Some of Welcombe's occupants

It is known that in the late 18th Century a Mrs Elizabeth Mercier was running a boarding school for girls in Harpenden, thought to have been housed at Welcombe. But by 1843, according to the 'tithe award schedule', the mansion was empty, having lately been occupied by a Mr Fogg.

By the 1871 Census, it had become the family home of Henry Tylston Hodgson (1843-1918), and his wife Charlotte, with their three children, Aubrey aged 4, Eustace aged 1 and three-month old Gerald. Befitting a family of their status, they employed a housekeeper, an upper housemaid, a cook, a nurse, an under nurse, a kitchen maid and a footman. Henry was a director of the Midland Railway, whose tracks formed the eastern boundary of Welcombe's grounds. By 1904 he had risen to become the MR's deputy chairman.

Henry and his wife became active in Harpenden cultural life, particularly in the provision of land for, and building of 'the Institute' (Harpenden Lecture Institution – now the Friends Meeting House) in 1887, as well as 'Hodgson's Cottages' alongside to the north (one of which was more recently occupied by the Harpenden Society's late chairman Ian Fulton). Hodgson served as a JP from 1874, as Harpenden's first County Councillor from 1889 and was appointed High Sheriff of Hertfordshire in 1907.

He chaired Harpenden's elaborate celebrations for Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887. Some twenty years later he built 'Rosemary' (28 Milton Road) for his wife. However, she sadly died the following year and the house remained empty, though he made it available to serve as a military hospital during the First World War. In 1914 he erected a rifle range at the southern end of the Welcombe estate.

Henry Tylston Hodgson's died in 1918 and the family sold the house. His son Gerald nevertheless continued his father's interest in public works for the benefit of Harpenden. Gerald Hodgson and his wife lived first at 'Blantyre' in Arden Grove and then at 'Bennetts' in Leyton Road. He planted Scots pines and larches around the run-off ponds in Southdown Road in 1929. His brother Victor Hodgson had collected many artefacts and paintings which he lodged with Harpenden Urban District Council 'for a future museum for Harpenden'.

But on Henry's death Welcombe passed to new owners, the Waltons, described as 'rich and generous people' who were said to have 'popularised their wealth by various fetes for charities and politics in the Welcombe grounds'. The Waltons, who had been associated with Vauxhall Motors, left Harpenden in 1931 (the year, perhaps not coincidentally, that Vauxhall was acquired by the American General Motors).

EDITOR'S VIEW

Alan Bunting

Whither the Neighbourhood Plan in tide of development?

Potentially momentous changes to Harpenden's townscape are in the pipeline. Most are either subjects of planning applications or are otherwise envisaged but they have yet to hit the headlines of the Herts Advertiser or come to public attention. For example, few people are surely yet aware that the idea of double-decking Harpenden Station's main (eastern) car park, long ago rejected for numerous reasons, notably objections from residents of Milton Road, could become a live issue once again.

Herts County Council has indicated its intention to bring pressure on St Albans District Council, necessarily in collaboration with Network Rail, to work out such a scheme. Its likely cost is obviously a key obstacle, given that SADC's ongoing budget plans include no relevant funding allocation. A way would have to be found of cutting through administrative red tape to possibly enable SADC and NR to share the cost between them.

Car parking in St Albans District as a whole was alluded to by SADC's new LibDem leader, Cllr Chris White, in an interview just before Christmas. He said 'we have a cunning plan for some of the car parking issues' – without divulging the details of any such plan.

It would appear to ordinary council tax payers however that SADC is not that short of funds to spend in Harpenden. Cllr White has declared that one of its more radical plans is to purchase, for some £18 million, the 'mixed block of commercial lets and flats' on the west side of the High Street, extending through to Leyton Road, between Church Green and Lloyds Bank. The aim, he said, would not only provide a rental income but, he added more sweepingly, also prevent it 'being broken up and transformed into something which doesn't fit with the rest of the town'.



SADC want to acquire this whole block of High Street property

Meanwhile at the Southdown end of Harpenden there is certainly no shortage of development plans. The landowner



These industrial units at Southdown are earmarked for redevelopment.

of Southdown Industrial Estate, that is British Coal Pension Fund, is in the process of evicting tenants, initially from those factory units backing on to the railway. Artscape is just one of the more familiar local businesses having to relocate. It is understood that BCPF initially applied for permission to build new housing on that part of the SIE site and when that was refused it reapplied to erect new 'commercial' units, comprising offices and warehouses. That application change is at least in compliance with the clause in Harpenden's Neighbourhood Plan which seeks to maintain places of employment in the town.

Elsewhere at Southdown the proposed re-development for housing by Jarvis of the large Pan Autos site in Grove Road, in the face of local objections, has moved forward a further stage after earlier hiccups. The big concern of more ardent objectors was that the recent council meeting to review the plans was poorly attended by fellow residents and that the local councillor who raised concerns at the meeting was then unable to back them up sufficiently strongly, seeming to make light of what was an important submission. Residents at the meeting were shocked and disappointed, something made even worse by the contrasting professionalism of Jarvis's representative.

If, as now appears likely, the Pan Autos site development is given the go-ahead, notwithstanding the scale of its three-storey frontage contravening the aims of the town's Neighbourhood Plan, then an undesirable precedent will be set for planning approval of the separate proposals to build yet more less-than-attractive housing on the immediately adjacent Jewsons builders merchants site.

Planning applications in Harpenden submitted over the next year or two and their approval or otherwise by SADC will prove an acid test of the Neighbourhood Plan's effectiveness and of the accompanying scepticism about its true value harboured by many residents.

SOCIETY PUBLIC MEETING DATES

Bim Afolami MP

Feb 27th

Venue TBC

Check our web site for details
www.harpendensociety.org

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