

THE HARPENDEN SOCIETY COMMITTEE MEETING
Monday 8 July 2024 at 10.00 a.m.
HTC Council Chamber
MINUTES

1. Present

Jeff Phillips (JP), Martyn Reed (MR), Harry Downie (HD), Alan Bunting (AB), John Lowe (JL), Paul Gloess (PGs), Ian Barrison (IB), Karl Wingfield (KW).and Bob Fletcher (RF).

2. In Attendance

Roger Butterworth (RB).

3. Apologies for absence

These were received from Ron Taylor (RT).

4. Past Meeting Minutes

Minutes of the meeting on 13 May 2024, previously circulated, were approved with a minor amendment as a true record.

5. Matters Arising from Minutes

None.

6. Treasurer's Report

- (a) The Treasurer's Report had been circulated by HD prior to the meeting. There were no questions raised regarding this report.
- (b) It was agreed that the expenses relating to the branding exercise should come from the normal Society funds not the Civic Development funds.

7. Secretary's Items.

- (a) Public Meetings:

The Election Hustings were held at the Katherine Warington School on the 17th June. The attendance was 220. The event went well but the online streaming was not successful as there were problems with the broadcast sound quality.

- (b) The future public meeting are as follows:

- I. Local Plan – JP reported that he had a tentative agreement from SADC that a representative would give an update to the state of the Local Plan in early 2025, probably in January.
- II. Dr Alison Cowan, a local GP with a special interest in Children and Young Person's mental health, has agreed to speak at a public meeting in October. Dr Cowan is the lead in the Harpenden PCN for this area of practice. The First Responders will be present at this meeting to raise funds for their activities. The publicity for this event needs to be started. *Action RT & IB*
- III. Other possible meetings included inviting the CEO of the Community Health Trust to talk about keeping people out of hospital, maybe linking it with the work being done by the PCN, inviting local farmers (Stuart Roberts, Ian Piggot?) to talk about the constraints of farming in the greenbelt, maybe a joint meeting with the History Society focussing on a backwards view of Harpenden's expansion from the 80s to the 30s.

- (c) It was agreed that the Society's potential move to a Charitable Incorporated Organization (CIO) would not be progressed as a new bank account would need to be obtained and members would need to be contacted to change their standing orders which would be a major task and it was

believed would lead to many members not renewing their subscriptions. The Society could re-instate the move to a CIO in the future if circumstances change.

8. **Chairman's Items.**

- (a) The Chairman's report had been circulated to all committee members prior to the meeting.
- (b) The appeal for help to support AB with producing the Society's newsletter has so far realised nothing, as has the search for someone to cover sport in our community. However, some progress has been made on finding support for the environment brief (more details to follow).
- (c) The Society is still waiting for the Town Council's commercial forum to be inaugurated, which was postponed due to the political purdah associated with the General Election.

9. **Membership Secretary's Items**

- (a) The Membership Secretary's report had been circulated by PGs prior to the meeting.
- (b) The Society has 499 (was 494) memberships covering 759 names plus 24 organisations listed that receive our complimentary newsletters (16 Schools, Town Council, Library, Herts Archives, 3 Local papers, Lea Springs & St Albans Civic Society). There have been 3 new members since the election hustings event.

10. **Newsletter Editor's Items**

AB reported that the summer newsletter will be 8 pages.

11. **Publicity**

The publicity report had been circulated by RT prior to the meeting. The new logo is now approved and will be used in future newsletters etc.

12. **Social Media**

- (a) The Social Media report had been circulated by MR prior to the meeting. Regular postings are being made to the Facebook and Nextdoor sites.
- (b) The rebranding is now complete with just the website to be updated. This is waiting for the position statements to be finalised.
- (c) MR reported that, working with Steve Collins of the Photographic Society and RT, the Society has now launched the Photography competition (closing on the 30th November, winners will be announced on the 31st December, exhibition in April 2025). The press release is completed, the poster and leaflet are with the printer, the website has been updated and the social media campaign has commenced.

13. **Awards**

- (a) RT reported after a two year absence the Society decided to expand the number of Awards this time round. There were a number of very worthy nominations across a diverse category of developments and buildings. The winners were based on the numbers of nominations cast by Committee members and Society members.
 - **Two prestigious Plaques** The affordable homes development at Roan Place. The new apartment block in Station Approach.
 - **Three framed Certificates of Merit** The new all weather pitch and ground development in Rothamsted Park. The extended Silver Palette Delicatessen in Vaughan Road The upstairs development of the new Dahlish Ice Cream parlour
 - **A Letter of Commendation** The new house in Moreton End Lane
- (b) Presentations will commence on July 25 at Roan Place. Other dates to follow soon after.

14. History Society

- (a) The History Society report had been circulated by RB prior to the meeting.
- (b) RB reported that a new strategy was going to trustees of the History Society about building on success of the Local History Day; basically, doing more, better.
 - I. Note: The History Society's charitable object is to "educate the public in the local history of Harpenden and district and to undertake research". The primary aim is to "make a valuable contribution to the cultural life of Harpenden."
 - II. A decision needs to be made about what is the correct balance in the museum between artefacts and maps with photos.
 - III. The History Society is about to initiate guided walks.
 - IV. Now have 10 trustees – likely to grow as key roles are filled.
 - V. The History Society has adopted a committee structure so different trustees can lead on different areas: Audit, Risk and Insurance Committee, Museum Committee and (being proposed) Marketing, Activities and Development Committee;

15. Transport Working Group

- (a) The Transport report had been circulated by KW prior to the meeting.
- (b) Luton Airport - all remains quiet in relation to getting the 19m conditions approved by LBC. For those who use Luton airport, getting to/from the airport remains a challenge at busy times (early morning, early evening). The rebuilding of the car park has started.
- (c) Luton Airport- The DCO decision was put back to 4th October following the calling of the general election. It will be interesting to see what a Labour government, with possibly a keener eye on climate change than the Conservatives had, make of the proliferation of airport expansion plans, in the light of the CCC's past recommendation that no new airport capacity should be allowed until aviation can show it will achieve Jet Zero (this year's CCC report is due 18 July – it has been delayed by the general election too – there should also be a further "progress" report on Jet Zero soon).

16. Health & Social Welfare Working Group

- (a) The Health & Social Welfare report had been circulated by IB prior to the meeting.
- (b) Locally, the funds to support the start of building the new hospital at Watford are inevitably delayed, due to the need for the incoming administration to review the New Hospital Programme.
- (c) Dame Christine Lenehan was appointed as the chair of the HCC partnership's multi-agency improvement board, in the wake of an inspection that found "systemic failures" in the provision of SEND services in the county.
 - I. At a meeting in mid June, Dame Christine also pointed to the "world class" work that had been done in the county in speech and language and the new SEND Academy, designed to address workforce issues. She highlighted the time it would take for parents and children to feel the difference from the ongoing detailed work at officer level, claiming that part of the challenge was now how to communicate the processes and the progress to date. The county-wide priority action plan has been drawn-up by officials from Hertfordshire County Council and the Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board.
 - I. In her role as independent chair, Dame Christine has been brought in to oversee the delivery of the plan, under the SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Programme.
 - II. Council officers reported at the meeting that "significant progress" had been made on the delivery of commitments in the action plan. But the report by officers also recognised that the experiences of children young people and families across the county would not improve immediately.

17. Built Environment Working Group

- (a) The Built Environment full report has been circulated by JL prior to the meeting. A steady trickle of applications for mostly residential extension/rebuilds. However, the number of applications that are being determined has increased, which is encouraging. None of the recent applications have been contentious, however, this week an application was submitted for redevelopment of: -
- I. 6 & 7 Batford Mill, Lower Luton Rd – (5/2024/0408) – to create a mixed-use scheme of flats, houses, retail and leisure facilities. The design is quite radical and echoes the style of Batford Springs opposite. The existing commercial buildings have been unused for a while, so regeneration would be welcome.
- (b) An update on current applications is as follows.
- I. Solum, Harpenden Station East Car Park - (5/2024/0796) – Scoping application. The District Council confirmed on the 5th July that the proposed redevelopment does not require an Environmental Statement to be prepared. Stand by for a full planning application to be submitted. This scheme will have major ramifications for the town.
 - II. Cross Lane- (5/2023/0317) The application is still being considered. Additional reports were submitted by applicants on 5 July relating to vehicular/pedestrian access. It is noteworthy that pre-planning advice from planners stated *“The scheme is considered inappropriate development in the Green Belt for which Consent can only be granted in very special circumstances. Additional work is required to demonstrate that such special circumstances exist. If the development was considered appropriate it is considered that any housing scheme must provide greater density than proposed. Consequently, the layout/design may need undergo significant change”*.
 - III. Land to north west of Harpenden – (5/2023/0327) Still pending – no additional comments on file since June 2024 from Highways.
 - IV. Land to north of Wheathampstead Road – (5/2022/2748) **Still Pending**
 - V. 6 High Street – (5/2023/0254) Still awaiting the outcome of planning appeal. (Post meeting note – The Planning Inspector has rejected this appeal).
 - VI. Sauncey View Lodge, Common Lane – (5/2023/2611) **Still Pending**
 - VII. Land at Baulk Close – (5/2023/1071) Application to build social housing on Green Belt land – withdrawn.
 - I. Harpenden Public Halls Still waiting to learn if the Council have selected a developer

18. Economic Activity Working Group

The Economic Activity report had been circulated by RT prior to the meeting. RT reported that sadly Jo Jo Maman Bebe are closing on July 20. It is believed that increased rent and rates were the issue. The Pop Up shop occupying Good Sports closed this week leaving a large empty space adjacent to the AGA shop which closed a year ago Whilst traditional retailers are NOT setting up in Harpenden, the BEAUTY/ HAIR sector continues to expand with MATILDA MAY opening in a new venue at the top of Station Rd next to Costa Coffee. There are no signs yet of what is happening to the HSBC unit. Barclays remains closed as does the old M&Co shop. Barbarello and the Chinese Take Away at the north end of town have been closed for over 2 years with no sign of occupation, leaving this area a bit of a dead zone.

19. AOB

Gambling – a discussion took place on RT’s paper on the issues surrounding excessive gambling but it was thought that this was more of a national issue and not particular to Harpenden so we should not feature this issue in our public meetings. It was proposed that this could possibly be a topic for our newsletter though.

Dates of the next committee meetings: 16 Sept, 11 Nov

Dates of the next Public Meetings: 17 Oct (Health).

The meeting closed at 12.00.