

Town centre parking issue hangs in the balance

Despite an overwhelming response from Harpenden shopkeepers and townspeople, as well as from Harpenden Town Council, in raising well-argued objections, St Albans District Council has reaffirmed its intention to impose tough new parking restrictions in the town. The plans, if implemented, would largely do away with free on-street parking in the town centre and impose new, arguably unrealistic, parking time limits and fewer disabled spaces.

While acknowledging SADC's undoubted need to meeting their current budget deficit the proposals are being widely regarded locally as unnecessarily draconian.

As this newsletter was being readied for publication, an open letter from SADC chief executive Amanda Foley was sent to Harpenden town clerk Carl Cheevers, effectively dismissing the concerted local objections, including those from the Harpenden Society, on the grounds that it 'could open the Council to (presumably thought hard to defend) legal challenges', because the decision would be based on results of that group rather than 'The Statement of Reasons and the Public Consultation'.

Though the chief executive's letter appears definitive in giving the go-ahead for the new town centre parking restrictions, it cannot be so cut and dried if local democracy means anything, because the letter pre-dated by ten days the deadline (August 15) by which formal objections were required to be submitted. One interpretation is that the original petition

comprising over 6,000 signatures should be forwarded a second time by way of confirmation. It is a state of affairs which has raised a lot of disenchantment, not to say anger, in the town,

particularly from retailers, left feeling disengaged from what should be a democratic process.

It should be recorded that, ahead of the most recent SADC response, at a packed Town Council meeting in late July, there was at least an agreement

that the proposals should not go unchallenged, notwithstanding the fact, as some outside observers have noted, that HTC and the rule-making District Council are now both under the same political party control.



Articles continues overleaf.

Retailers canvassed by the Harpenden Society for their views on the revised parking regime were as opposed to its provisions as they had been three or four years ago to the tentatively proposed pedestrianisation of the Lower High Street. However, little evidence has emerged to support the emotive assertion that parking charges would ‘kill the High Street’, though a reduction in the town centre’s already threatened vibrancy remains a risk, running counter to the widely-supported exhortation ‘to shop local’.

In the view of the Harpenden Society, far more transparency is needed on the intended funding of the plans. Perusal of what financial data is readily available suggests that far more money would be raised through parking charges than that needed, crucially, to fund traffic warden enforcement. And if that is indeed the case, there is a legal obligation to use any such surpluses to improve matters, most obviously through provision of additional public parking spaces.

In the Society’s opinion, the practicalities of the SADC’s proposals are basically unworkable; a 20 minute (or even a 30 minute) ‘free period’ is quite unrealistic for



someone typically needing to walk from their parked car to do even a ‘one off’ shop and then return. It would lead to people ignoring the limit – unless rigid, highly visible, enforcement was applied.

Also, there are unexplained inconsistencies across the town centre, Avenue St Nicholas

and Rothamsted Avenue being notably excluded from the scheme and residents of Bowers Way, as now, continuing to benefit from a total parking ban during working/ shopping hours.

We believe that for early implementation, but for a limited, say six month period –



allowing time for a proper review of the issue – the following measures could sensibly be put in place:

One hour (minimum) free parking in all town centre on-street parking bays

One further hour in those be available at a cost of £2.50, representing a ‘premium’ over a two-hour public car park charge, thereby encouraging shoppers to use the car parks without becoming a deterrent to ‘shop local’. Parking permits, paid for annually, should be

available to all residents, allowing two hours parking in the car parks – common practice elsewhere – reducing the hassle of using ticket machines and/or smart phone apps SADC should adopt a ‘zero tolerance’ approach to illegal parking – particularly parking on double yellow lines and on pavements – by recruiting additional traffic wardens (under whatever job title) as well as appropriate charge payment technology to maximise enforcement.

A host of other parking related issues remain to be resolved, and the Harpenden Society has expressed its willingness to be involved in the debate with both SADC and HTC and with other potentially affected local organisations.

New Mayor's role goes hand-in-hand with active charity work

Harpenden's newly-appointed Town Mayor is Philippa Liver, known to all her council colleagues and to many others locally as Pip. She takes over the mayoral mantle from her fellow councillor Fiona Gaskell, under whom she served as Deputy Mayor, and who was the first Liberal Democrat holder of the office, after many years of Conservative control.

Her local government experience includes not only some five years representing the East Ward on Harpenden Town Council, but three years, on a broader canvas, as St Albans District Councillor, again with a Harpenden East portfolio.

Pip was born in Salisbury, Wiltshire, where she says she inherited from her parents an interest in politics, though in a non-party sense of the word. She and her family have lived in Harpenden for eighteen years after moving from South London, first via a house in Redbourn, during which time she says she became increasingly interested and involved in local and community affairs. A degree in government from Birmingham University and a later University of Hertfordshire law degree clearly equipped her well for civic responsibilities.

At the same time she became progressively immersed in the legal and administrative niceties of charity work, through an involvement with Citizen's Advice, first in St Albans and subsequently for six or seven years with Dacorum in the Hemel Hempstead area.

A particular need for CA clients in the last few years, to which Pip's attention has been directed, is embodied in the Department of Work and Pensions 'Help to Claim' project relating to the provision of Universal Credit.

As she points out, the scheme been a godsend to many in straitened financial circumstances,



triggered particularly by Covid emergency upheavals.

Another charity for which Pip Lever has devoted time and effort is ICAN, whose mission statement is to help special needs children communicate with the help of speech and language therapists.

She is looking forward to an active year as Town Mayor, with numerous HTC events in the pipeline, among them the project to build a new sports pavilion in Rothamsted Park which has now been given the go-ahead.

See plans on page X.

Farming well and eating well

Exciting new developments in the world of agriculture, driven by new technology, including artificial intelligence, were spelled out at a well-attended public meeting organised by

the **Harpenden Society**, in the lecture theatre of Katherine Warrington School by **James Clarke BA**, communications and engagement director of Rothamsted Research.



Under the questioning title *Can we eat well sustainably?*, Mr Clarke asserted that in the next 50 years we would (globally) need to produce as much food as had been consumed over our entire human history. Sustainable farming would be key and that would need multiple solutions, he said, not least because of the effects of climate change, adding that ‘we must reduce the use of chemicals’, making their application much more selective.

That was being helped by the smart use of robots and drones, with GPS tracking a valuable tool, which now enabled weeds to be distinguished from productive crops. A more holistic approach was needed, in order to raise productivity, per acre or hectare.

‘Biology had to be made to work in our favour’, he declared, adding that, without action towards food production sustainability, that is remaining with traditional agriculture, the risks of starvation in many parts of the world

would grow. There was accordingly a need to increase yields tenfold or more in the coming decades.

Pressures on land use had led to crop cultivation regrettably becoming destructive, through the cutting down of rain forests in Brazil and elsewhere, with a controversial demand for palm oil notably. Factors which added to Rothamsted Research’s 21st Century challenges included climate change, evidence of which was apparent in February this year being the UK’s wettest on record, following the hottest summer in 2022.

There was now also the increasingly recognised and unwanted side effects of ostensibly beneficial farm chemicals, the costs of which had in any case, he added, ‘gone through the roof’ as a result of the war in Ukraine.

Nutritionally poor diets were another area of concern for Rothamsted researchers, whose teams were working on ‘nutritionally-enhanced crops and novel bio-products’, though he said things had moved on from the GM controversy. Yields per hectare, of rice for instance, could be improved through selective GM techniques and, where appropriate, to dry soil rather than traditional wet ‘paddy’ cultivation.



More recent national media attention on Rothamsted’s work had focussed on the development of a new kind of white flour which contained 50% more fibre to provide healthier eating for the many people who, for whatever reason,

preferred white to wholemeal or other higher-fibre brown bread.

A more holistic approach to agriculture and the production of food, including meat and dairy as well as arable products for human consumption, had to be the way forward, declared Mr Clarke. It was clearly necessary to maximise yield per hectare in 'smarter' ways, by adopting of new technology, by way of robots, drones and even artificial intelligence. By such means even small variations in soil content/quality and resulting crop (eg wheat) growth across a field could ensure the most productive use of expensive chemicals.

Although in his presentation Mr Clarke paid tribute to Rothamsted's 'founding fathers, Sir John Bennet Lawes and Sir Henry Gilbert some 180 years ago, in developing the world's first commercial chemical fertilisers, it had now come to be recognised that the use of such chemicals needed to be minimised.

In the mid-1960s Rothamsted initiated its major study into the role – for good and bad – of insects in the world of agriculture. Monitoring aphids, large moths and many other migrating insects, provided long-term data which had a wide range of scientific and applied uses. Today it was possible for example to identify a) welcome and b) predatory insect species immediately, via robot or drone, through the measured frequency of their wing beats.

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Another relatively recent strategy was 'inter cropping' where fields were divided into strips, with two different crops being grown in alternate strips, which could then be switched from one year to the next, to achieve greater yields per hectare than traditional crop rotation.



So-called 'cell grazing' can double livestock productivity per hectare with environmental benefits

Rounding off Mr Clarke's presentation and on a complementary subject, **Katharine Tate**, a Harpenden-based award-winning nutritionist, described *'How healthy eating can keep you fit and well*, with an emphasis on controlling one's blood sugar level through following a diet based on a range of nutrients, including a 'rainbow' of different coloured fruit and vegetables.



clear in particular of stimulants, especially sweet and fizzy (caffein laden) drinks.

Ms Tate reminded her audience that the benefits of a well-planned dietary regime, in the promotion of overall wellbeing, included 'digestive health' which in turn brought more restful sleeping.





Good news for Harpenden this summer with mini resurgences across several sectors. Starting on the High Street with the opening of a new Ladies Boutique called Swann Boutique in Bowers Parade.



Secondly Travel Four Seasons will be moving from a first floor suite to a shop on the High Street next to Ripples. AND with travel in the air the old AGA shop will soon become TRAVELBAG.



But that's not all The Waffle House have confirmed they will open by the end of August



and Manor Pharmacy will be moving to the old HSBC bank at the corner of Station Rd. The Library Concourse has been busy recently with regular Friday market stalls and the daily appearance of Middle Eastern Bites.



Finally recent installation work around Leyton Green and the War Memorial will see stylish lighting along the perimeter to give the area a distinctive look once Autumn arrives.



Southdown shops have also welcomed a new hospitality business called Town Grill Kebab, replacing Emilio's Chicken restaurant. Finally down in Cold Harbour Lane the new LEA GRANGE Care Home is now open for viewing.



Top Society Award for new Westfield mixed housing

The Harpenden Society's main Plaque Award for developments completed in 2023 has been won by the mix of social and 'affordable' housing built on the former allotment site adjacent to Westfield playing field. The project, initially under the name Roan Place, but now given the street name Rolt Close, comprises 12 terraced – mainly three bedroom – town houses plus a larger pair of semis and a block of eight apartments.



Above. Society chairman Jeff Phillips presents the 2023 Award plaque to Town Mayor Pip Liver, accompanied by Awards Secretary Ron Taylor (right) and representatives of Peabody Trust housing association



Rolt Close's main terrace of 12 three-bedroom houses

Harpenden Town Council has spearheaded the project, with the important financial backing of the legendary Peabody housing group, nowadays in the UK categorised as a not-for-profit housing association. The Award Plaque was presented to Town Mayor Pip Liver by Harpenden Society chairman Jeff Phillips.

Rolt Close

The name Rolt Close was chosen by Harpenden Town Council for the attractive new cul-de-sac of houses and apartments at Westfield after consultation with the town's Local History Society. Herbert Rolt (1898 – 1919) was a First World War combatant, who is buried in St Nicholas Churchyard and whose name appears on the town's War Memorial on Church Green. He was born into a Harpenden family whose associations with the then village can be dated back



New pavilion gets the green light



Plans for the new sports pavilion in Rothamsted Park, initially reported in our Winter 2022/23 newsletter, have now been given the go-ahead by Harpenden Town Council. It will effectively replace the two separate unsightly ‘shed like’ cricket and football clubhouses, both of which have long been fenced-off for health and safety reasons, not least involving asbestos issues.

The new ‘Amenbury Lane Pavilion’, will be located closer than the existing abandoned football clubhouse to the western beech hedge boundary of Harpenden Town football ground. Additional tree planting nearby forming a small coppice is shown on the plans, comprising ‘appropriate species to match those in the area’.

That tree planting area will cover the old clubhouse ‘footprint’, bordered by a new length of screening beech hedge between the tree planting and the new pavilion. The plans indicate the new pavilion’s relatively close proximity to the ‘Junior 9 A Side Football Pitch’ and playing boundary of the park’s main cricket pitch.

With a total floor area of 2300sq ft, the new pavilion is planned – by the Sports Clubhouses specialist design consultancy – not only to meet the needs of visiting as well as home cricket and football teams, but also to be architecturally striking. It features ‘natural larch main sidewall cladding’ above a red stock

brickwork plinth, timber columns and striking exposed timber-framed gable ends. The shallow pitched Britmet ‘Aluzinc’ lightweight metal granulated tiled shallow roof supports a small ornamental clocktower as well as ten energy-generating solar panels.

Meanwhile the all-important front elevation of the building, facing the pitches, features graphite grey framed sliding/folding glass doors accessing the main 500sq ft communal lobby/café area, envisaging adequate space for over 30 people to be seated at two long tables, served by an adjacent kitchen.

Ladies and gents toilet/washrooms for general use are shown, separately from the two large changing rooms for home and visiting teams and officials, each changing room with its own double showers and washbasins, as well as four lockers for each team use. Special separate provision is made for the disabled needing assisted unimpeded access.

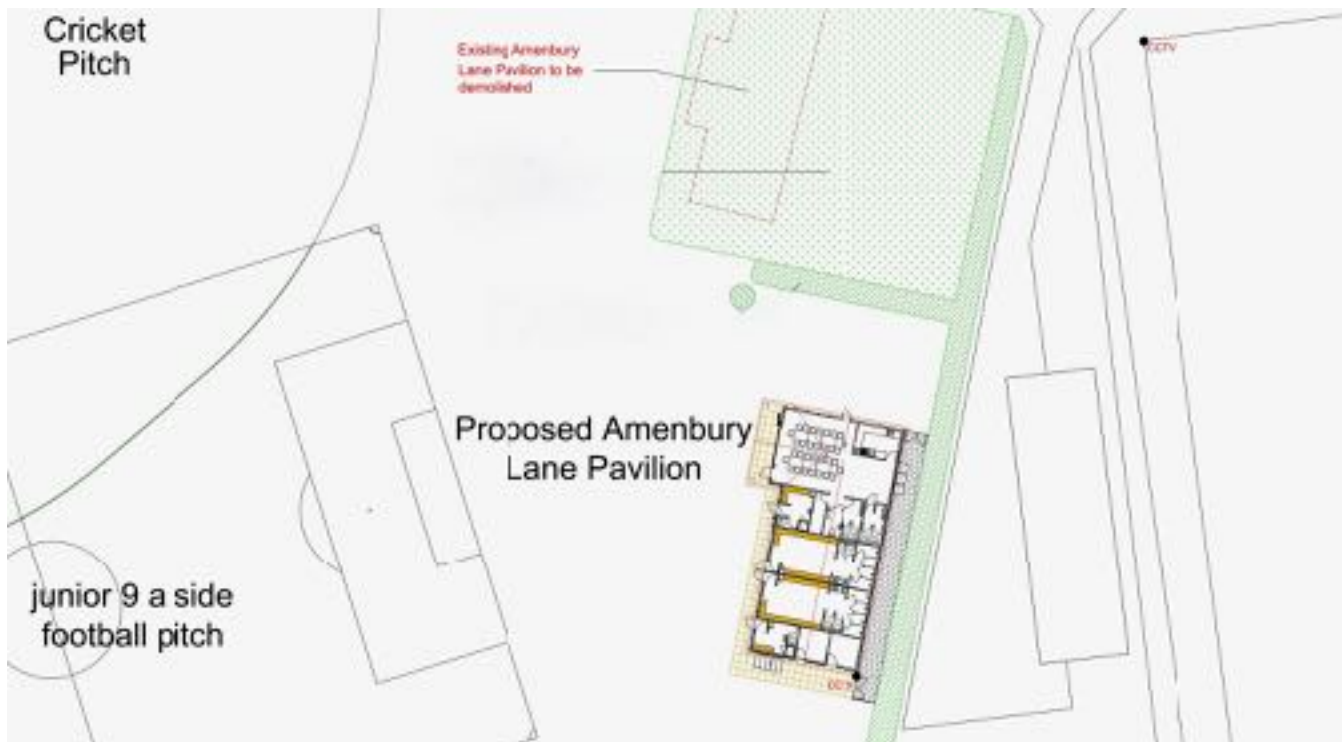
At the southern end of the building, occupying some 15% of the floor area and accessible from outside, are a plant/services room and general store. A 5 to 6ft-wide paved area surrounds the front and southern end of the new pavilion, while the similar-width space between the rear of the building and the existing beech hedge is a closed-off designated ‘compound’ area.



ELEVATION A



ELEVATION B



Heightened views of our local landscapes

Few would dispute the fact that Harpenden's numerous green spaces, notably the Common and Rothamsted Park, are at their most visually attractive when trees are in full leaf and the sun is shining. That is not to detract from their year-round appeal, to nature lovers especially, whether walking or more leisurely strolling.

But Harpenden-based painter and printmaker Andrew Keenleyside, using techniques unfamiliar to most people, has set out to bring a new and heightened – and, indeed, brightened – perspective to those treasured local landscapes, effectively negating any weather issues. A selection of his eye-catching pictures have been on display at the annual **Art on the Common** event which, this year, was better attended than ever.

Attempting to describe the genre of Andrew's images in mere words would be a thankless task. Some might even be tempted to call them psychedelic, in reference to their startlingly vivid colours. Those few we reproduce here provide an inkling, though they necessarily lack the vibrancy of the originals with their spots of colour 'relief', standing out from the otherwise flat surface of the pictures which are also able to convey what amounts to a sense of movement.

For his Art on the Common displays, Andrew has understandably selected local scenes in and around Harpenden, recognisable to many in every way apart from their startling 'larger

than life' colourisation. Views of the attractively wooded areas of the Common and Rothamsted Park predominate, together with stretches of the Nickey Line footpath/cycle-way, where bridges such as the one at Ambrose Lane add a visual focus of interest.

For those newsletter readers wanting a more detailed description of the Giclee process used by Andrew to achieve such attractively 'offbeat' images of familiar local scenes, he has produced a useful and colourfully-illustrated brochure. It explains that Giclee, pronounced 'g-clay', is derived from the

French verb meaning 'to squirt or spray', and is a fine art digital process combining pigment based inks with high-quality fibrous archival quality paper or canvas. A photograph can thus be transformed into a 'painterly soft and decorative image'



Baa Lamb Trees



Latest Bridge painting

ANDREW KEENLEYSIDE (below) has lived in Harpenden for 34 years, but his roots are farther north, having been born in County Durham where, he says, his interest in the visual arts was kindled at the age of only seven or eight. It led to his eventually enrolling in a foundation art course at Harrogate Art College. He subsequently moved south to study art at Kingston in Surrey, in due course taking up a teaching post at Reading Grammar School. Further career advancement brought him to Hertfordshire, first to Verulam School in St Albans and later to Haberdashers School at Elstree where he was appointed Head of the school's art department. Andrew says he reckons he learned more about painting and the visual arts generally through teaching others than as an art student.



Baa Lamb Trees with snow

Addressing today's 'youthful challenges'

Young people's mental health has become an increasingly topical issue nationally and indeed globally, drawing attention from both printed and broadcast media. The mental wellbeing of those categorised as 'generation Z', namely those in their teens and twenties, for many of whom, not coincidentally, the smart phone has become an ever-present and seemingly essential accessory, is a matter of growing concern.



It is clear that locally, in the Harpenden and St Albans area, the psychological as well as the physical welfare of youngsters is being constructively addressed by several organisations, notably evident in the

appointment by Harpenden's socially-active High Street Methodist Church earlier this year of a full-time 'Lead Youth Worker'. She is Ruth Lindridge, whose role she explains is that of a 'catalyst' helping

EDITOR'S VIEW

Alan Bunting

Space Exploration

As our front page coverage makes clear, the on-street parking restriction proposals for central Harpenden have many ramifications. Alas, benefits other than those accruing to St Albans District Council's admittedly depleted coffers are not easy to identify. The council's initial plans, details of which have been posted visibly in prominent positions in the town centre shopping area, threaten car-borne shoppers especially with additional inconvenience, as well as being hit in the pocket.

For those shoppers – like the town's commuters – the logistical as well as the financial downside could of course be avoided by leaving their cars at home and walking or cycling, as environmentalists and others logically advocate. Though for many the distances involved (as well as the weight and bulk of their shopping) make it unrealistic, especially in inclement weather.

Meanwhile champions of public transport urge us instead to make greater use of local bus services, in which context the admirable volunteer-run Monday-to-Friday Harpenden Hopper minibus service is encouragingly gaining more patronage, as older motorists in particular see an alternative to the already challenging issues of town centre parking.

I use the word 'challenging' advisedly, because – leaving aside parking bay time limits and/or cost – anyone driving into the town with the intention of parking somewhere within comfortable (shopping bag laden) walking distance of their chosen retail



outlet(s) is faced with finding a space.

In peak times, especially mid-week, unoccupied kerbside parking spaces anywhere in the High Street/Station Road area are as rare as

hen's teeth. Only

sublime optimists embarking on such 'space exploration' must rank hope above expectation. Even those with an identifying blue badge cannot be sure of finding an unoccupied 'disabled' space.

In such busy times, Amenbury Lane and Bowers Way public car parks can also be chock-a-block, likewise quite often Sainsbury's and Waitrose's (supposedly) customer-only car parks. The resulting frustration means that would-be shoppers are then either tempted to take their custom away from Harpenden altogether, or are forced to embark on a 'space exploration' exercise, looking for somewhere to park further way from the shops, in residential streets, including the so-called Avenues area, alas also long identified for free all-day parking by early morning weekday commuters.

To declare Harpenden's town centre parking problems insoluble is unhelpful. But given the complex issues involved, including the seemingly unspoken need for more on- and off-street – free or paid-for – parking spaces, St Albans District Council's latest edict offers little if any cheer for the hapless car-borne shopper.

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