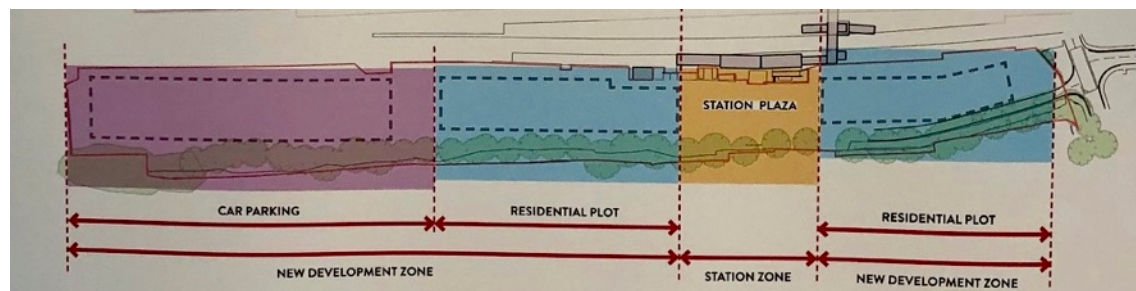




Station car park could see 100 new apartments built



Up to a hundred new homes could be built on the present East car park at Harpenden Station. The plan, costing around £30 million, has been put forward by Solum, a development company that boasts its particular experience in developing town centre 'brownfield' sites. It is 50:50 owned by Network Rail and the Kier construction group (the main contractor on the Katherine Warington School development).



It is proposed that the long and relatively narrow site, of around 6 acres in area, which currently provides some 450 car park spaces – used mainly by commuters – would be effectively divided into four adjacent sections. A two-level commuter/public car park would occupy the southernmost 40% of the total area, furthest from Station Road, ie closest to Aysgarth Close.

Its parking capacity would be about 360 spaces, an implied reduction of some 20% from the current level. Solum argues such a reduction is justified on the basis of several surveys it has undertaken, into not just recent parking usage but also longer-term Harpenden commuter numbers through the working week, which the company maintains have declined

post-Covid and are not projected to rise in the foreseeable future.

The likelihood of car-borne Harpenden commuter numbers increasing in the medium to long term, especially if major new housing developments, like that proposed by L&G to the north of Bloomfield Road are given the go-ahead, did not figure in Solum's formal project presentations. However, there could clearly be a conflicting factor (also not mentioned by Solum) that is a financial deterrent to future station car park usage, should Network Rail strive to recoup its investment in the project through a stiff increase in parking charges.

Residential development, in the form of two separate apartment blocks, would occupy a further approximately 45% of the site, but with a comparatively spacious and hopefully attractive area, dubbed a 'Station Plaza', between them, adjacent to the rail passenger entrance to platform 1. It would engender, in Solum's words, 'a sense of arrival', also

accommodating cycle racks and ticket machines and where possibly station staff assistance would be positioned.

Current controversy about Network Rail's cost-saving

intention – later

rescinded – to close all station ticket offices, makes it likely that ticket enquiries would continue to be dealt with only at the main entrance on the West side of the station.

Each of the two residential blocks would comprise up to about fifty apartments, mainly single- and two-bedroom flats, on as many as four floors, above a ground floor 'undercroft' for residents' parking, waste bin stowage and so on. Additional reserved resident's parking is envisaged immediately adjacent to the apartment blocks. Inevitably controversial is the suggested provision of only 70 parking spaces for the residents of up to a hundred apartments currently planned.

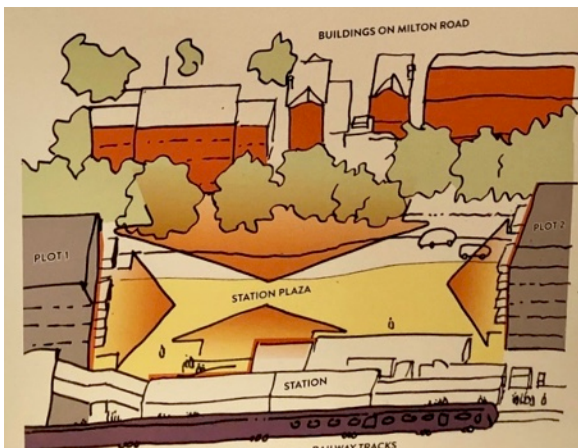


An exhibition at the Eric Morecambe Centre setting out Solum's East Station car park plans was well attended

The precise number of apartments in the Solum proposals is unlikely to be determined before planning procedures get underway. One of the important determinants is the number of storeys in each block, an issue that is likely to arise when planning approval comes to be sought in the context of the development's visual appearance. Solum officials acknowledge that visibility concerns might arise about potential intrusion above the treeline, as viewed from across the Common.

Pointing out that because the project is still at a very early stage, Solum says many formalities have yet to be addressed. One of those is how its new housing proposal would fit into St Albans District Council's Local Plan. Somewhat surprisingly, it was not put forward in response to SADC's 2022 'Call for Sites', indicating that Solum's East station car park programme has, in major project terms, been formulated quite hurriedly.

A number of potential obstacles have yet to be overcome. One is that of probable objections to the scheme from nearby residents, especially in Milton Road and its several 'Court' side turnings, some of whom presently enjoy a view of the Common, albeit across the railway line.



More fundamentally, there is the serious issue of access to the site from Station Road, for residents of the proposed new housing as well as for car-driving commuters. The present dangerously narrow East car park entry road, with its chaotic provision for pedestrians alongside, is fraught with hazards, aggravated by the poorly indicated priorities on the four-way junction with Carlton Road, made worse by the close proximity of the light-controlled pedestrian crossing just a few yards east along Station Road.



Addressing chaotic car park entry from Station Road could be crucial planning issue.

Solum makes clear that it is all too aware of the Station Road entry road challenges. The project could not possibly go forward without that particular nettle being grasped, it says by way of 'an access road upgrade'. The intention, necessarily needing approval by Network Rail civil engineers, is – after regrettable removal of the existing line of quite large mature trees – to excavate, and presumably reinforce, part of the railway embankment close to the existing pedestrian tunnel. That would enable the access road to be widened sufficiently to allow comfortable two-way vehicular traffic as well as separated cycle and walking paths.



Untidy four-way Carlton Road junction adds to site entry challenges

In recent years there has been regular debate about providing some sort of access to the East station car park at its southern end, that is from Crabtree Lane, via Aysgarth Close. But it has always been resisted due to residents' objections. The Solum plans do indeed include such provision, but for pedestrians and cyclists only – notwithstanding the location at that end of the site of the projected main two-level commuter parking.

Should the Solum project get planning approval, Harpenden commuters would clearly be faced with huge disruption to their daily travel routine, the East station car park effectively being totally or very largely out of use for a year or more, and alas with no prospect of parking being made any easier, but probably more expensive, when the work is completed.

‘Time running out for finalising Local Plan’

Without the submission, in an acceptable form of a **Local Plan** for St Albans City and District before the middle of next year, protection of key areas of the Green Belt against housing development might well be lost. It was a warning that came from District and County Councillor Paul de Kort, (below) who represents

Harpenden wards on both local authorities. He was addressing a public meeting in early February attended by over 140 townspeople



hosted by the **Harpenden Society** at Katherine Warrington School.

Cllr de Kort pointed out that although a recent statement by Secretary of State Michael Gove had indicated a move away from mandatory to ‘advisory’ house building targets, it was clear that the requirement for SADC to sanction the building of just over 15,000 new homes between now and 2041, would not necessarily be eased.

And, in answer to a question from the audience, he acknowledged that the outcome of the General Election later this year



Society welcome team at the KWS reception

added a further element of uncertainty.

Although the council was keen to make maximum use of so-called ‘brownfield’ sites in the District, surveys had shown that they could accommodate only about 900 dwellings. It meant that land had therefore to be made available elsewhere for building around 11,000 more homes, which implied sacrificing Green Belt.

A comprehensive ARUP group survey was commissioned last year by SADC, following the council’s basically-unconditional ‘call for sites’. It yielded a large number of responses, from the owners

of numerous pockets of Green Belt land, which could hypothetically accommodate around 64,000 new homes across the District. Cllr de Kort said the large response was not altogether surprising, given that removal of Green Belt protection, notably from agricultural land in this part of the country nowadays effectively increased its value up to a hundred fold.

But the practicality and extent of some Green Belt development aspirations was questioned. Cllr de Kort cited as an important example the L&G group’s already submitted and much-publicised application to build around 550 homes on Green Belt land north of Bloomfield Road, which contrasted starkly with the figure of just 293 homes calculated by ARUP.

That lower number had been influenced especially by the distance of the site from the town centre and consequent transport implications. It reflected the extent of the inevitable increase in traffic volumes along the A1081 between the L&G site and the town centre and railway station.



An even larger Green Belt site identified for a large number of new homes, on the north-east side of Harpenden beyond Noke Shot and Porters Hill, while superficially a favourable location, could be rejected on the grounds of difficult transport access, as well as its topography and resultant ‘coalescence’ with existing housing, which the Local Plan specifically seeks to avoid in maintaining the character of the area.

The amount of land required for a given number of new homes could, of course, pointed out Cllr de Kort, be reduced by ‘building upwards’, but likely local resistance to multi-storey apartment blocks was bound to be an issue. In that context, the ARUP survey made no reference, presumably because of its very recent submission, to the Solum group proposal – see pages 1 and 2 – to develop around 100 homes in two five-storey blocks on Harpenden Station’s East car park.

Harpenden Trust spreads its wings

Perhaps rivalled in longevity only by the Harpenden Society's 93 years, the Harpenden Trust has, in its no less distinguished 75-year history, clocked up many milestones. But arguably none could be counted more groundbreaking than its acquisition in 2023 of the lease on the former Southdown Methodist Halls above the Co-op supermarket. As Trust chairman Richard Nichols makes clear, there is a commitment in the terms of what is a long-term lease, to keep the newly-named Harpenden Trust Halls as an invaluable community asset. And it has greatly increased the Trust's profile beyond that of a benevolent local charity and, necessarily, its involvement in the life of Harpenden's townspeople.

With a total floor area of over 7300 sq ft, the new Trust Halls augment the two long-established Renwick Hall and Randall Room meeting venues in the nearby Trust Centre. Together they provide a total of five meeting rooms/halls, ranging in size from 300 up to 1560 sq ft, accommodating the needs of a variety of local organisations, from exercise, dancing and yoga groups, to educational activities such as u3a, Learning for Leisure and German classes, as well as for example Bridge for Beginners.

Among the new upstairs Trust Halls meeting rooms, refurbished and attractively redecorated in fresh colour schemes with eye-catching works of art from local school students, is the Charles Hill Lounge, newly equipped with comfortable upholstered seating for groups of up to about twenty people. It is named after the late Lord Hill of Luton, a distinguished Harpenden resident remembered by many – and subject of a 2019 Society newsletter encomium – as the BBC's wartime 'Radio Doctor'.

It is hoped that the Trust and its work will become better known, particularly in view of its expanded presence, through the opening of its 'Well Bean Café'. Situated in the spacious lobby area of the new Halls complex above the Co-op, it is open to all, perhaps most obviously Southdown shoppers. Open from 10.30am to 12.30pm from Monday to Friday, it is designed, says Richard, to convey a relaxed and

homely atmosphere for those drinking their coffee or tea, with the offering of a range of mid-morning snacks. There are no fixed menu prices; café patrons are asked instead to make what they feel to be a suitable donation to the Trust.

At other times of the day the café area is intended to act as a focal point for the Trust's wellbeing initiatives, including the recently-formed Ribbon Cancer Support Group as well as the Wellbeing Hub now being established in partnership with the town's Primary Care Network, made up of local healthcare centres, especially Harpenden's three GP surgeries. The Hub is aimed particularly at alleviating dementia-related

problems amongst the elderly.

The Harpenden Trust has, to the surprise of some people encountering its work for the first time since its foundation in 1948, been run entirely by volunteers, over 500 of them at the last count. They are primarily involved in providing support – financed via the Trust's Care Fund

– for the less fortunate members of the local community, notably the elderly, families and young people.

Though Harpenden is regarded, particularly by outsiders, as a comparatively wealthy community, there are areas away from the town centre where today's acknowledged cost-of-living crisis is adding to existing financial or other hardship. The Care Fund is maintained entirely by voluntary donations, principally through the Trust's well-publicised annual Christmas Appeal, which sees donation envelopes posted through almost every Harpenden letterbox.



Richard Nichols outside the new Harpenden Trust Halls.



Artwork from local school students brightens the new Trust Halls.

Awareness of the work of the Trust, under the umbrella of the Care Fund, was unquestionably brought to local public attention as never before, under what were regrettable circumstances. The Covid emergency saw Trust volunteers, augmented in number to around 750, perform invaluable stewarding duties at the Vaccination Centre in the Public Halls. Users of Harpenden Library are another group for whom the Trust is now more 'visible', through the work of auxiliary helpers with Trust identification on part-time duty, notably on Wednesday afternoons.

Quite separate from the Care Fund is the Trust's Community Fund. Established in 2008, it is reliant on income from a substantial capital donation made by the Abbeyfield (Harpenden) Society (unconnected to the Harpenden Society). Its primary role is to provide financial support for local community projects, via specific grants for projects designed to benefit the life of the town.

In 15 years the Community Fund has made grants of more than £1 million to over 230 recipients. Typical of the major local projects which have been wholly or partly funded are the new and upgraded children's public play areas in Rothamsted Park and other sites following their transfer from District Council to Harpenden Town Council management.



Playground and other improvements at a number of Harpenden schools are among the subjects of current 2022/23 agreed grant applications, related to which is support for the Harpenden Plus Partnership of Schools which, at a time of seemingly growing health problems, provides counselling for children, especially in the 5 to 11 age group, with associated advice and support for parents.

A grant of £7,500 to the £100,000 cost of the splendid new boardwalk completed in 2022 across Batford Springs nature reserve was another example of the Trust's recent Community Fund financing.



The refurbished – and renamed – Well Bean Café.

Richard Nichols profile

As the Harpenden Trust's chairman since 2019, Richard Nichols has raised its profile immeasurably through his hard work and devotion to the role as well as his all too apparent good-natured enthusiasm, all of which have come together in the Trust's expansion, embodied in the lease of the halls above the Co-op.

A Harpenden resident since 1995, he came to the Trust after his semi-retirement from the world of finance, having spent ten years as an accountant with the PwC group, before an active role in building the Citigate marketing and public relations group.

At the age of 58 Richard remains active as an independent

advisor to budding entrepreneurs, especially those of today's digitally aware 'generation Z', where market research remains, as ever, a vital contributor to any successful enterprise.



Beyond his two to three days a week devoted to overseeing the administration and work of the Harpenden Trust, he has also been a volunteer for the Prince's Trust, a charity set up by King Charles in 1976, as its mission statement declares, 'to help vulnerable young people get their lives on track'.

Museum official opening now in sight

Saturday April 20 promises to be a red letter day for Harpenden Local History Society when, under its auspices, the long-awaited Harpenden Museum is due to be officially opened. Cutting the ribbon at what is being described as part of an all-day 'community event', will be the then newly-installed High Sheriff of Hertfordshire and former county councillor Annie Brewster, recently designated as HLHS's Patron. She will be supported on the day by the society's Honorary President, Harpenden Town Mayor Fiona Gaskell,

On the day of the museum's inauguration, to which everyone in the town is invited, the whole of the Eric Morecambe Centre, in which the museum is housed, will be open to visitors, including its 500-seat auditorium, meeting rooms and refreshment and reception areas.

Established just over 50 years ago in 1973, as an offshoot of the Harpenden Society – which had itself come into being just 43 years earlier – HLHS gradually came, from modest beginnings, to become part of the town's vital fabric, contributing greatly to its sense of historical identity.



Prime motivator of the ambitious Museum project: archivist David Keen

During the last decade especially, as the history society's collection of archive material and other memorabilia has continued to grow, the long talked-about need for a Harpenden Museum worthy of the name had become more persistent. And as plans for the major redevelopment of Harpenden's leisure and sports facilities began to take shape during the last decade, most notably involving the conversion of the existing sports centre into what was to become the Eric Morecambe Centre, the opportunity arose for those museum aspirations to become firm plans.

As reported in this newsletter a year and more ago, following protracted negotiations with St Albans District Council, space was made available in the lower ground floor of the new EMC to house an exhibition/display area and, importantly, a properly-equipped document and artefact storage room – appropriately dubbed the Les Casey Room, named in



memory of one of the key HLHS founders and a major benefactor of the museum. With a generous total floor area of about 330sq ft, the museum nevertheless has its space limitations. And that led to the adoption of 'roller racking' in the Les Casey Room, of the kind widely used for storage in many of the country's major art galleries and museums.

Four back-to-back paired shelving stacks which can move laterally on rollers, enables optimum use to be made of the room's 130sq ft of floorspace to accommodate hundreds of artefacts and thousands of documents. That necessarily brought the related challenge of recording the location of every item to ensure ready retrieval.



Two examples of the displays highlighting part of Harpenden's history

It should be added that even when the museum is closed to visitors, EMC theatre patrons will be given a 'taster', thanks to an illuminated 'shop window' containing a regularly-changed display facing on to the theatre exit corridor.



Museum archive storage now 'professionally' managed

Calling all 'third agers'

By Eric Midwinter

Roughly 8,000 residents in Harpenden are in what can logically be called the 'Third Age', no longer in full employment and/or are no longer involved in sometimes burdensome child-rearing, though it is alleged that some parents sniff bitterly over the notion of no longer being responsible for the care of their offspring beyond the age of about sixteen.

Just over 40 years ago, in 1982, Harpenden was one of a dozen or so towns which established what was declared to be a 'University of the Third Age', soon to be succinctly known as the 'U3A', comprising groups of self-mobilising older people keen to advance and broaden their knowledge beyond what they had learned during the formal education of their younger days. Needless to say, U3A meetings also have their social appeal where new friendships are established

Harpenden U3A was the first in the country to establish learning events of this kind which initially were entirely free. Even today there are no course fees in addition to a modest overall membership subscription (currently £18 a year) and, for some groups, minimal room hire contributions are requested.

Twice a month, on Thursday afternoons, all U3A members are welcome to 'speaker meetings' at the Harpenden Trust Centre, where either a paid-for guest speaker or one of our own members is invited to talk, on wide variety of subjects.

Of arguably greater importance, are the activities of the many special interest groups, which meet in different venues, including members' homes. Those range from poetry, literary and musical appreciation through to history and current affairs, as well as more physically active pursuits, notably walking and less strenuous 'strolling', the appeal of the latter enhanced by the prospect of a convivial pub lunch to round off the morning's exercise.

Four decades ago 'ageism' was much more rife, with supposed medical and educational experts pooh-poohing the idea that older people with some time on their hands might welcome some further education. Some universities even tried to stop U3As using the term 'university' because they didn't offer degrees or other formal 'paper' qualifications.

It transpired that every one of the first Harpenden U3A members, both male and female, had seen 1939-45 war service, in either a military or other capacity, including one who had suffered years as a prisoner of the Japanese. Not one of them was university educated. But their unquestionable life experiences certainly contributed to their U3A involvement.

There are now six thriving U3As in the St Albans City and District area, including Redbourn and Wheathampstead and over a thousand across the UK, with over 400,000 members.

Truth to tell, Harpenden U3A has had its ups and downs, languishing in the doldrums for a time during the early years of the 21st century, with membership declining through illness and, of course, the unstoppable work of the Grim Reaper. But active recruitment of new members, especially over the last five or six years, under the stimulating chairmanship of the late Doug Nevell, Viv Chandler and now Roger Thompson, has seen a hearty and healthy revival. At the last count there were some thirty groups catering for almost every 'third age' activity. Yes, there's something for everybody.

Any Harpenden Society members who admit to being 'third agers' and with an inclination to broaden their knowledge on a host of subjects, as well as their leisure interests, could do worse than exploring what U3A has to offer. The website <https://u3asites.org.uk/harpenden/welcome> can tell you more.

Eric Midwinter



Now aged 91, Eric Midwinter OBE was for five years the valued editor of this newsletter before the present incumbent took over in 2015. In 1980, along with two colleagues, he laid the foundations of what was to become the nationwide U3A. A Mancunian by birth, he and his wife Margaret are long-time Harpenden residents and Harpenden Society members.

He describes himself as an author, educationalist, gerontologist and social historian, with specialisms in Victorian social history, sport and light entertainment. His career landmarks include those of: Doctor of Philosophy and Lifetime Scholar of St Catharine's College, Cambridge; Director of the Liverpool Educational Priority Area Project; Head of the National Consumer Council's Public Affairs Unit; Director of the Centre for Policy on Ageing; Chairman of the Open University's Health and Social Welfare Board.

Ron's Winter Retail Round-Up

Now that Valentine's Day is gone can 'Spring Fever' be far behind? The Harpenden High Street is already showing signs with spring



Threads



bulbs starting to flower and some changes to retail premises already taking place. **Threads** have had a facelift to their interior bringing in a fresh modern look. Major supermarket chain **Morrisons** have opened a 'DAILY' style small store and

Specsavers will shortly be opening their store just a few doors up bringing the number of Optician locations to five. AND in the hospitality stakes, the **Waffle House** will be opening soon in the old Prezzo unit, and **Nonna's Cafe and Restaurant** has already opened in the unit next to Kwik Fit. They have a wide ranging menu at affordable prices.



Almost adjacent to **Nonna's** will be a new Hairdressing salon called **Johnson Blythe**, a small chain with headquarters in Hertford who promise to offer a service that offers new heights and new meanings!

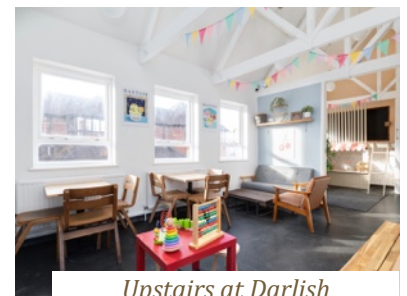


Changes of use to the Banking sector look almost static although the owner of the narrow section in Leyton Rd between Manor Pharmacy and Weston Funeral Directors has applied for planning permission to build a small retail unit. The old **Barclays** still has two and a half years of the lease to run and they show no sign of progressing negotiations, even though the landlord has planning permission to create three retail units on the ground floor.



On the opposite side of the road **HSBC** is now in the hands of retail agents **Jessop & Co** who are trying to find new occupants. The original intention of HSBC was to sell the site at auction.

And in terms of a **Banking Hub** Harpenden's application remains blocked by the presence of Nationwide Building Society although the Town Council is challenging this.



Upstairs at Darlish

Darlish Ice Cream opp Waitrose have transformed their upstairs into a children's play area with seating. And **Wenzel's** seem to have established a regular trade following their opening last November.

At the time of going to press the Society are eagerly awaiting news of future developments for the High Street from Harpenden Town Council.

So keep shopping locally and support all local businesses. *Ron Taylor*

Airport growth: objections mired in argument

As this newsletter went to press, Luton Airport's application – to the government-appointed Examining Authority (EA) – to grow its capacity from (the now regrettably approved) 19 million passengers per annum to an outlandish 32mppa, was due to close on February 10.

Over recent months there have been a series of hearings, with four or five deadlines set for combative for-and-against submissions, as well as letters requesting information and written questions from the EA.

The **Harpenden Society** has made further submissions underlining our concerns on the inevitable increase in aircraft noise disturbance which would result from a near 80% growth in airport operations, and its effect on broader transport issues, especially on traffic congestion locally, on the A1081 and B653 as well as the approaches to junction 10 of the M1. Unlike some other groups endeavouring to resist the proposed

expansion, we have also highlighted its undoubtedly questionable financial viability.

In the light of the EA's eventual report, the Secretary of State for Transport (currently Mark Harper) is due to make a final decision, which is expected before the end of 2024, though a possible change of government before then could well delay, or sway, the outcome.



Southdown Hardware lives on!

Surely to the delight of everyone in Harpenden, fears about the future of Southdown Hardware, the town's favourite shop for what seems like everything except food, have been allayed. The business has been acquired by local entrepreneur Peter Metcalfe, who formally took over from long-time owner Paul Russell on the 1st of February. But during the next few weeks they will be working in harness as Peter gets to grips with the challenges associated not least with stock control in what has been dubbed an 'Aladdin's Cave'. Regular customers will be pleased to know that the new owner envisages no significant changes.



All smiles as Peter Metcalfe (right) takes over the reins from Paul Russell.



Nominations for the 2023 Awards are now closed.

Society members and local residents have been considering which developments or buildings completed during 2023 are worthy of an Award.

A variety of choices have been made all of which will be assessed ahead of the official announcements at the AGM in April (date TBC on the Society web site)

Heat pumps enhance new Batford social housing

As reported in our Winter newsletter a year ago, St Albans District Council abandoned its earlier plans to redevelop the Harpenden Public Halls site to include some social housing. However, provision of such housing elsewhere in the town has gone ahead. Four new semi-detached houses, completed by local developer Jarvis some two years ago but hitherto unoccupied, have been acquired for rental by SADC as social housing. They are numbers 5, 6, 7, and 8 Viking Close, a new cul-de-sac off Noke Shot at Batford and are part of a ten-home development, the remainder of which – comprising four more identical semis and a pair of bungalows – are for private sale through estate agent Frosts.



Batford's new social housing: four new energy-efficient semis.

Built on what was a council-owned communal garage site, with original 1940s council estate housing on three sides, the new architecturally-distinctive three-bedroom properties are, says SADC, being let to families who had previously lived in smaller, more restricted council accommodation. The new homes incorporate several noteworthy sustainable features designed to minimise carbon emissions, including air source heat pumps instead of gas boilers, as well as solar roof panels.



Solar roof panels

They are said to meet the government's top A energy rating, with each of the new homes calculated to generate just 0.8 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions per year, compared with what is deemed to be the national household average of 6 tonnes per year. Also potentially enhancing their energy saving attributes, in keeping with the council's goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions across the St Albans

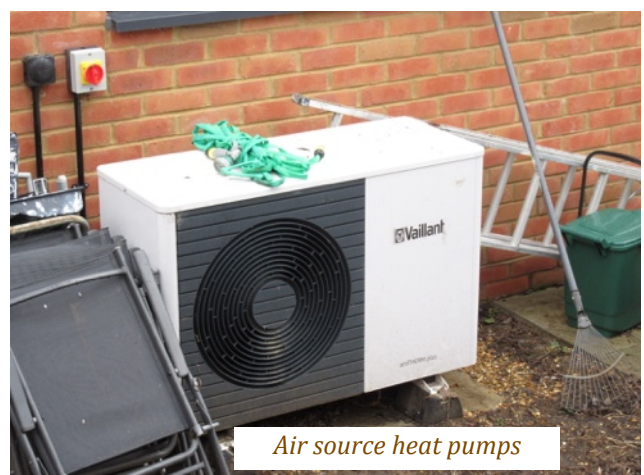


Electric vehicle charging points

District to net zero by 2030, is the provision of electric vehicle charging points.

Meanwhile, from a broader environmental perspective, the development is accompanied by 22 newly planted trees on the site, together with the installation of bat and bird boxes aimed at attracting more wildlife to the surrounding area.

The rear gardens back on to Porters Hill play area which two years ago was transferred to Harpenden Town Council ownership and subsequently planted with hedge saplings along its boundaries.



Air source heat pumps

A NEWSWORTHY STORY

As one of its regular lady customers commented recently, 'it's got everything – all it lacks are elastic walls!'. She was referring to NEWS4U, Harpenden's now longest-established newsagent at no 1 Station Road and its snugly-modest interior dimensions. It is a shop whose astonishingly extensive range of merchandise is concentrated in a no less bewilderingly tight space.



But there are few 'space related' customer complaints, thanks to the high probability of finding what you want, particularly among the 500-plus magazine and periodical titles, and of course newspapers, on display on NEWS4U's floor-to-ceiling shelves.

An unspoken and self-regulating clockwise 'one way system' via the two narrow 'there and back' aisles, to and from the pay counter, has long been established, which even at busy times ensures a largely unimpeded customer flow. In any case the question of space limitation is more than compensated by the always cheery welcome from 62-year old Nitin Shah and his wife Jaishree, who have owned the business since 2007 and who live in the flat above.



Nitin Shah has a cheery welcome for all his customers

Their Harpenden newsagency experience goes back to their time working at the Balfours shop and Post Office at Southdown before it closed and the Post Office was relocated inside the nearby Co-op. It could be added that a much more recent shake-up of the Harpenden retail scene promises a boost for NEWS4U's key magazine/periodical sales. That is the disappearance from the High Street of Martin the Newsagent, the shop now trading under the Morrisons Daily banner as a general convenience store, with only a small news section holding mainly daily newspapers.

For those quite numerous customers across the town who want to keep up with the printed news, but still like their daily paper delivered through the

letterbox, an assiduous 'army' of about 25 'paper boys', 'paper girls' and a few 'paper oldies' maintains the service. For late shoppers in the town NEWS4U is open until 6pm – or 5.30pm on Saturday.

NEWS4U has gradually diversified into greetings cards, snack foods and an ice cream cabinet, to further tempt the customer who might have just popped in for his or her favourite paper or magazine. And a more recent and perhaps unlikely addition, undoubtedly aimed at younger generation customers, are Warhammer table-top wargame models and hardware, with accompanying paints.

The two-storey building dates back to Victorian times, as perhaps indicated by its low ceilings, and the shop is thought by Harpenden history researcher Geoff Woodward to have started trading in 1879 or 1893, partly as a lending library. The first owner was one Joseph Trustram and though the family connections ceased, as many older Harpenden residents will recall, the Trustrams name was retained until the Shahs took over.

A quite different concern from NEWS4U's everyday business which has become a real headache for the Shahs is the periodic risk of the shop being flooded after a bout of heavy rain. Situated as it is at the bottom of Station Road, and with a floor level several inches below that of the pavement outside, it is all too vulnerable to water ingress and potential stock damage.

Some kind of blockage of the aged sewer network under Station Road is understood to be to blame, but there has been evident 'buck passing' responsibility between Hertfordshire Highways and Thames Water. However, as this newsletter went to press, serious work was due to start on identifying and sorting out the problem. In his efforts to spur the authorities into action Nitin Shah now

has moral support from his next-door business neighbour Barrie Woolston, owner of the fairly new Molasses House art gallery whose premises are also threatened when rainstorms are forecast.



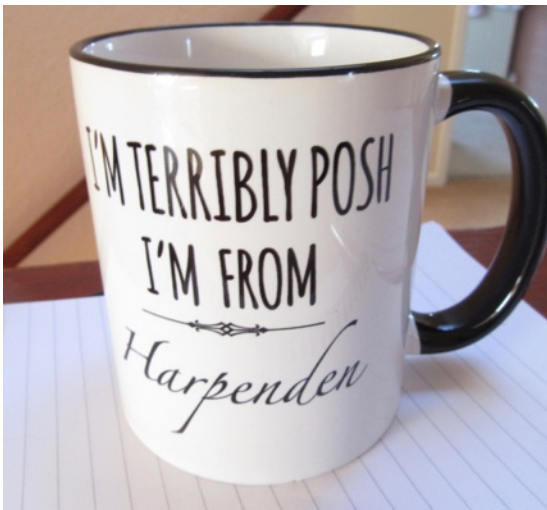
NEWS4U's 500-plus magazine titles

EDITOR'S VIEW

Alan Bunting

Prosperity in perspective

'I'M TERRIBLY POSH, I'M FROM Harpenden' – so reads the inscription on a nice coffee mug (see picture) I was given for Christmas. Though I categorically dissociate myself from its sentiments, the words tend to confirm the perceived image of our town held by some outsiders. It is a perception borne out by Harpenden's apparent prosperity and its high ranking in several recent surveys purporting to identify the most desirable places to live in the UK.



Such surveys tend to be based on house prices, with estate agents providing the data which, one should add, are necessarily 'coloured' by their own interests. Any town in pleasant rural surroundings within comfortable commuting distance from London is bound to attract house hunters, with property prices reflected accordingly. It was ever thus.

Ready access to the M1 is another Harpenden 'plus', not just for London commuters but for those regularly wanting to travel north, either for business or, especially at weekends, pleasure. It is therefore no coincidence that native Scots and northerners – typically business people – choosing to relocate to within easy reach of London tend to start looking first at Hertfordshire, rather than Surrey, Kent or even Buckinghamshire.

Consequently, Harpenden is often a 'prime target' for them, something again reflected in its higher house



prices when like-for-like comparisons are made with properties further south, in similarly attractive small commuter country towns like say Godalming, East Grinstead or Farnham.

The seemingly accelerated proliferation of new multi-million pound houses in Park Avenue and thereabouts are a further confirmation of Harpenden's desirability as the place to live, especially for those of 'more than adequate' means.

However, that evidently continuing local prosperity, at a time when the country as a whole is deemed to be close to recession, brings with it a downside, notably more cars clogging the town centre. Too many of them are large 4x4s – sometimes dubbed 'Chelsea tractors', most with mediocre fuel efficiency contributing disproportionately to climate change, to say nothing of their uncomfortably tight fit in regular-width car park spaces and whose mud-free tyres bear witness to them rarely if ever venturing off road.

In contrast to Harpenden's outward prosperity are the town's many pockets of – sometimes hidden – hardship, of which the aforementioned well-heeled incomers might well be oblivious. But that deprivation is commendably acknowledged and actively addressed by philanthropic organisations such as the Harpenden Trust, Harpenden Helping Hand, the Salvation Army and Citizen's Advice, who all do sterling work in supporting the less fortunate members of our community.

So anyone considering themselves – without irony – being worthy of the apophthegm on my coffee mug, as a 'posh' Harpenden resident, should perhaps become better acquainted with life right across their home town.

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