



## Autumn News 2021 Founded in 1930

### (Yet another) new Local Plan 'to start from scratch'

Following the necessary formalities of the Harpenden Society's statutory 2021 Annual General Meeting in late September, held for the first time in the imposingly-appointed lecture theatre of the new Katherine Warrington School, guest speaker Jamie Day, chair of St Albans District Council's planning referral committee, and vice-chair of its **Local Plan (LP)** advisory group, came to the rostrum.

Cllr Day began by pointing out that, following several abortive attempts in recent years by SADC's previous Conservative-controlled administration to draft a **Plan** acceptable to central government inspectors, the council – now under Liberal Democrat control – was obliged to start again with 'a clean sheet of paper'. He told around 70 Society members, meeting for the first time since Covid restrictions were eased, that the new **LP** would have to meet wider criteria than its predecessors, most pointedly in respect of demand for new housing.



**Cllr Jamie Day**

In a six-stage process involving consultations and submissions which, he said, would include cross-party councillor liaison, a road map for the preparation of an 'all new' **LP** had been set out, with the aim of its 'adoption' (and by implication approval) by the end of 2023. Serious work on the new **LP** was initially due to begin in January 2022, though Cllr Day said there was now likely to be a delay of around three months.

A government White Paper with the noncommittal title 'Planning for the Future' left many vital issues 'in the air' he said, not least in respect of potential sites for new dwellings. As before there needed to be a 'call for sites', not just for large developments but also for small typically 'brown field' sites. The process would this time have to be done 'in co-operation with neighbouring authorities' principally, in SADC's case, with Dacorum (Hemel Hempstead) and Watford.

Dealing with Harpenden specifically, Cllr Day said 56 sites in and around the town had been identified, of which 38 were existing, 14 'revised' and 4 'new'. The latter were: 'land to the south of Annables Lane (Kinsbourne Green)'; 'land adjacent to Batford Mill'; 'Chelford Fabrics site, Coldharbour Lane'; and 'plots 3 and 4 Lower Luton Road'.

He emphasised that the council had set a target for 40% of new housing to be 'affordable', though he did not venture a more precise definition of the term, in a part of Hertfordshire where first-time buyers (or renters) struggle to get on the housing ladder. In a subsequent exchange from the floor, Harpenden Society member John Davis said identifying those new smaller sites in the town should not provide an excuse to build more large 'unaffordable' houses.

Cllr Day suggested however that the Lib Dem's capture of the Chesham-Amersham by-election from the Conservatives in June had concentrated government minds, especially that of the bizarrely-titled new 'levelling-up' minister Michael Gove who, perhaps grudgingly, declared Mr Day, had a reputation for 'getting things done'.

Of particular relevance, he added, was the thorough-going Green Belt review promised by the government, in the context of which Cllr Day pointed to SADC's now declared policy of incorporating climate change, health and sustainability as important priorities in its **LP** strategy moving forward. That would include protection of smaller green areas intended to meet local environmental concerns. Tree planting and protection of wildlife habitats were duly earmarked for attention as the wider aspects of the new **LP** came under scrutiny.



***The Katherine Warrington assembly hall proves to be a perfect venue for a large audience***

A lively Q&A session followed Cllr Day's presentation, during which one attendee maintained that the government's demand for 300,000 new homes a year to be built was totally unrealistic, if only because it was way beyond the capacity of the country's construction industry, and that statutory housing targets across the country should be scaled back accordingly.

**Continues on next page**

From the floor Society member Alan Falconer sought an assurance from Cllr Day that the six-stage **LP** consultation process should include, in any provisions affecting Harpenden, active participation of the Town Council, including reference to the already resident-approved **Neighbourhood Plan**.



**Society chairman Phil Waters thanks Cllr Jamie Day for his presentation**

David Rankin, chairman of Harpenden Green Belt Association, declared that local planning authorities like SADC should be able to set their own new housing targets – ‘targets we can live with’ rather than those being set ‘from above’ which confer few if any benefits for existing residents.

Proposals put forward during the last

twelve months for a major shake-up in local government in Hertfordshire, involving the effective replacement of all the county’s district and borough councils with a single county ‘unitary authority’, had, said Mr Rankin, been widely criticised, not least unsurprisingly by those councils, including SADC. But he pointed out that such a Herts unitary authority, with control over planning issues, would enable government-decreed house-building ‘quotas’ to be applied more sensibly across the county.

That would, he suggested, allow a town such as Stevenage, for example, with fewer constraints on available building sites, to relieve the pressure, on Green Belt land especially,

around Harpenden and in other parts of St Albans district, while, at the same time, making a higher proportion of new homes likely to be ‘affordable’. Furthermore, a town like Stevenage could offer more local employment opportunities to the occupants of newly-built homes.

Harpenden Society vice-chairman Jeff Phillips highlighted the importance of supporting infrastructure, citing the case of Bishops Stortford in the east of the county which gave the go-ahead for thousands of new homes on former agricultural land whose residents were bereft of any schools or social/health facilities.

Another meeting attendee questioned the adequacy of the present proposals for hospital provision in SADC’s area, should the population increase accompanying the housing plans materialise, citing in particular the plans to greatly enlarge Watford General Hospital ‘at the expense of’ far more geographically accessible facilities in St Albans and Harpenden.



**Society members greet guests at the check-in desk for the annual AGM and Local Plan presentation**

## ‘TELL ME A STORY’ Writing competition for senior school students



**Last year’s competition was thwarted by the Covid pandemic, despite which 12 entries were received (but unjudged) and the authors rewarded with book tokens.**

So after recent consultation with the Head Teachers we are now re launching the competition in early November.

The challenge is to write an original story up to 1,500 words long from 4 subjects. There will be 3 age categories and prizes in each for the winning students and the schools.

Entries have to be submitted by Feb 4th 2022 for judging to take place with winners announced on March 16th 2022.

Updates in the Winter newsletter and [www.harpendensociety.org](http://www.harpendensociety.org)

# Face-to-face with our Town Council

At the Harpenden Society committee's Autumn liaison meeting with Harpenden Town Council (HTC), represented by town mayor Paul Cousin and town clerk Carl Cheevers, the ongoing status of the Covid-initiated Lower High Street restrictions was high on the agenda. But it preceded the abrupt October 13 Herts County Council announcement which led quickly to the removal of parking obstructions and with the barrier gates at Station Road and by Sainsbury's opened to traffic, though remaining for potential future use.

Harpenden shopkeepers look certain to welcome the decision, though it is not without controversy, especially bearing in mind Harpenden's unique town centre street configuration. Though there was understandable and near-unanimous eagerness by retailers for 'a return to normality', other vox pop opinion gatherers had found many of their customers as well as café/restaurant patrons to be in favour of what they saw as the 'pedestrian friendly' status quo.

Irrespective of the car-vs-pedestrian issues in the town centre, HTC made it clear at the liaison meeting that it wanted to explore future allocation and relative pricing of paid-for off-street parking for specific users, as part of a 'zonal' approach which would extend beyond just parking. That would involve looking at potential play areas and so-called 'friendship benches' for example and taking in roads outside the main High Street/Station Road shopping area, such as Thompsons Close, Vaughan Road and Leyton Green.

Attention at the liaison meeting then turned to Rothamsted Park, now under HTC ownership, though the 3.2 acre area levelled up with spoil from the leisure centre construction excavations will not be handed over to HTC until problems with stones coming to the grass-seeded surface have been resolved. HTC had expressed a hope that its use as a football or other sport playing area would become viable 'by the end of this year'. Because of the need for an all-over remedial 'stone picking' process, the hope appears optimistic.

An all-weather 3G 'astroturf' pitch for Harpenden Town Football Club ground – within the precincts of Rothamsted Park – was planned, at a cost to HTC of around £250,000, effectively conditional on the 3G pitch being made available for big matches played by the Colts young people's football club.

Meanwhile, elsewhere in the park, the change of ownership enabled plans to be formulated for the removal and replacement of the two existing football and cricket pavilions, the former in a poor condition and the latter (close to the end of Orchard Avenue) long derelict and abandoned, largely because of inherently hazardous asbestos in its structure. A single new pavilion would likely serve the needs of both football and cricket players in the park. If, as seemed probable, it was to occupy the site of the present football

pavilion, near the hedge-enclosed Harpenden Town ground, removal of the cricket pavilion could make way for additional Orchard Avenue accessed car parking spaces.

Following our liaison meeting, HTC announced its intention to get the views of the local community on its plans for Rothamsted Park, 'ensuring that no inappropriate development is taken forward'. It says aspirational improvements to the park's facilities will be set out in a new 2022 to 2025 management plan.

**Harpenden residents are invited to take part in a 'community engagement exercise' by completing a survey at**

**[www.harpenden.gov.uk/rothamsted-park-management-plan](http://www.harpenden.gov.uk/rothamsted-park-management-plan), the closing date for which is Friday December 3.**

Turning to local health and wellbeing issues, Harpenden Society representatives at the meeting, while acknowledging that HTC had no direct input to local NHS decision-making, stressed the need for the whole community to support the Red House update programme. It was felt by many people in the town that the ambitious original plans put forward about three years ago had been regrettably 'watered down' by the Central London Community Healthcare Trust which now held the purse strings. And any lobbying by local bodies, including local authorities, to reinvigorate the scheme, would be welcomed.



***Back to normal! Lower High Street with two barrier gates open, kerbside parking resumed and new white lines to mark Vaughan Road priority.***

# New Arts Centre shows its all-round quality



*Official opening by the Mayor of the City and District of St Albans, Cllr. Edgar Hill, (far left) Harpenden Mayor Cllr. Paul Cousin, Eric's daughter Gail and Cllr. Robert Donald. (far right)*

Ahead of the **Eric Morecambe Centre's** official October 16 opening, an invitation to get a close look around Harpenden's new public arts and cultural venue in Rothamsted Park was gladly taken up by a group from the Harpenden Society in mid-September. The building – converted from the shell of the town's former sports centre – nevertheless features a radically altered interior structure and, externally, a wide and 'wheelchair friendly' sloping access up to the main entrance at first-floor level.



*Attractive sweeping ramped entrance to the Eric Morecambe Centre*

Once through the self-opening glass entry doors, the spaciousness of the main foyer or lobby area is impressive, in sharp contrast to the undeniably cramped lobby space at the pre-World War 2 Public Halls – something to be particularly welcomed by the hoped-for throngs of audience members arriving for major theatrical or social events. The lobby, whose glass walls provide a sweeping view across the park, incorporates a long-counter café and a limited number of tables and chairs.

Like the Public Halls, the **EMC** is managed by the Cambridgeshire-based **1Life** hospitality group, under contract to St Albans District Council. The group's operations director Steve Bambury who welcomed our visiting group said Harpenden's new centre was 'the jewel in 1Life's crown', a claim unlikely to be disputed by the venue's future patrons and visitors.

He then handed over, for our comprehensive conducted tour, to 1Life's area general manager Jo Ditch, appointed last April, whose responsibilities also include the familiar Alban Arena in St Albans city centre.

The EMC's function rooms, including those assigned to **Harpenden Local History Society's** long-awaited town museum for exhibitions and artefact storage, are certainly impressive in size and of usefully practical proportions for



*EMC manager Jo Ditch: 'Our forward programme includes cinema presentations'.*

meetings, young people's playtime/keep-fit and special events.

Ms Ditch said an opportunity had been recognised under Covid restrictions for the new centre's function rooms to be hired for periodic meetings by business organisations whose staff had switched to 'hybrid' or full-time home working. It should be added that the whole building is air-conditioned – a notable advance on the sometimes stifling atmosphere prevailing in the 83-year-old Public Halls.

Unquestionably the most dramatic advance in comparison with the erstwhile Large Public Hall is the EMC's 510-seat auditorium with its 'proper' theatre-style banked seating; 150 people can be accommodated in the rearmost seven rows of fixed balcony seats and a further 170 seats (also banked) can be rapidly deployed, as and when required, by a novel electrically-powered extendable/retractable system. When the lower banked seating is retracted an additional area of level floor between the fixed balcony seating and the stage becomes available, for additional 'stalls' seating, for larger exhibitions or for social occasions such as dancing.



*Theatre/cinema type banked seating combines comfort with good visibility.*

Due attention has been paid to the all-important matter of seat comfort; the cinema or theatre type seats are fully upholstered and each of our visiting group was able to vouch for both their comfort and adequate leg room. 'Aural' comfort has also been duly heeded, with the EMC theatre's acoustics said to meet a high standard. Particular attention has been paid to the need for a uniform sound level throughout the auditorium, ensuring that audience members at the back of the gallery enjoy the same level of speech (or music) audibility as those sitting in the 'stalls'.

At the same time, with potential disturbance to nearby residents in mind during more raucous entertainment events, particularly those in the immediately-adjacent 23a Leyton Road apartments, we were told that above-average sound insulation was included in the architects' brief.

One of the finishing touches to what is undoubtedly a striking new theatrical venue for Harpenden, and vividly demonstrated to parties of visitors on the EMC's official opening day, is its state-of-the-art computer-managed lighting installation, promising an extra dramatic 'dimension' to stage productions like the forthcoming pantomime 'Aladdin' and the eagerly-awaited rehoused Gang Show.



***The front seven rows of seats can be rapidly retracted to provide more open floor area.***

Because the EMC had necessarily to be accommodated within the former sports centre building, some dimensional limitations were unavoidable. The theatre stage is not as deep (front to back) as could be wished, so provision has been made to extend it forward manually into the auditorium space on a purpose-designed supporting structure, as and when required, typically for orchestral and/or choral events.

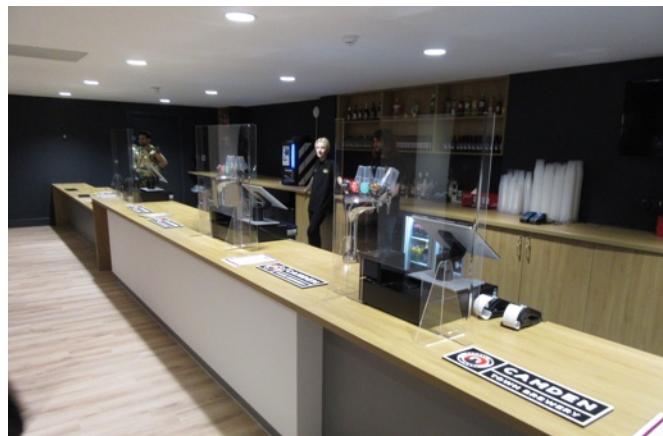
Another dimensional constraint is that, during performances of plays especially, actor entries from 'stage right' are effectively ruled out. Actors and show performers are sure to be impressed however with the spacious backstage facilities – dressing rooms (with showers) and the statutory theatrical 'green room'.

A further potential role for the EMC theatre is a use by local schools for major concerts and end-of-term leavers' days. It is clear that the layout of the theatre is much better suited to a cinema role than was the large Public Hall, where poor seat comfort and an indifferent sound system did little to attract patrons. Jo Ditch says plans for the showing of films are expected to go ahead 'after December'. There is an acknowledgement however that the new facility could be up against competition from the periodic film showings in Rothamsted Research's modern and comfortable bank-seated lecture theatre.



***EMC's first official event: well-attended Local History Society meeting***

A feature of the lower (ground) floor is a large bar area offering plenty of space for audience members to enjoy a drink and circulate before performances begin and of course during intervals.



***Fancy a drink? The bar for EMC theatre patrons is notably spacious.***

No one attending the new Eric Morecambe Centre can fail to be impressed, not least by the high quality of what in mundane terms might be called the 'fixtures and fittings', including such details as the lighting, the internal doors and glass-panelled guard rails.

Reiterating the views expressed in our Summer newsletter, everyone involved must earnestly hope that the EMC will enjoy a healthy build-up of regular attractive events which do justice to the planning and investment which has clearly gone into unquestionably Harpenden's most ambitious civic project of its kind for many years.



***Local History Society mounted an EMC Inauguration Day display in its dedicated Museum Room.***



***Welcoming cafe area in the roomy EMC entrance lobby.***

# At last, some tangible progress at the Red House

After repeated delays, resulting in part from changes of administration within the structure of the NHS, the conversion of Harpenden Memorial Hospital – familiarly known as the ‘Red House’ – into a more modern and better equipped health centre for our town is now well advanced. And in August the Harpenden Society had an early opportunity to see what is an impressive transformation of the interior of the 120-year-old architecturally distinctive

The architects have contrived to maintain and integrate many of the late 19th Century classical features, notably the prominent wooden staircase, contrasting with the ‘high tech’ appointments to be expected in meeting the high environmental and hygienic standards necessarily demanded today, particularly now against the backdrop of restrictive Covid-related precautions.

In the words of Andrew Ridley, chief executive of CLCH, the Red House refurbishment has been ‘an opportunity to deliver an integrated model of care that builds on our experience as an established healthcare provider in Hertfordshire’. His

CLCH colleagues Glenda Esmond and Tim Pullen, and Sarah Camplin from Herts Valley Clinical Commissioning Group, escorted our tour of the updated facilities on the Harpenden Memorial Hospital site, including the spacious post World War 2 extensions which formerly housed maternity and elderly care departments. The upgraded (and computer equipped) individual treatment rooms are increased in number from four to ten.



New exterior signage



New reception area

building, which in 1930 was historically ‘donated’ to the people of Harpenden by its owner Sir Halley Stewart, vice-chairman of the London Brick Company.

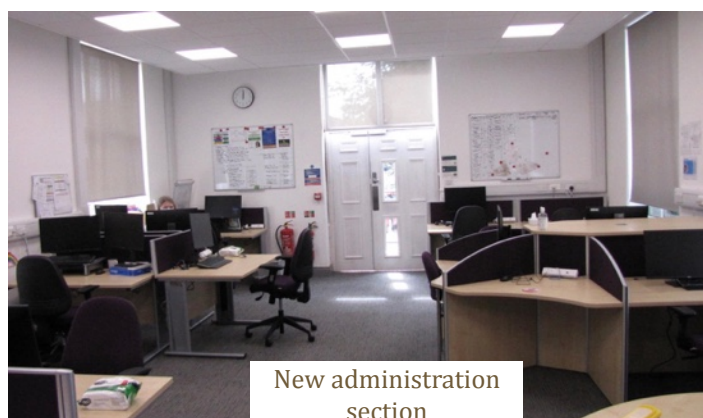
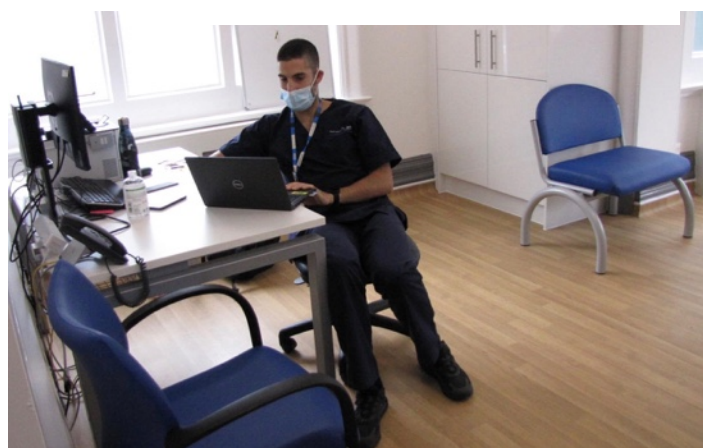
Notional ownership of the Red House was transferred to Hertfordshire NHS Community Trust (HCT) in 2015. Over the following four years, under scrutiny from a residents’ ‘ginger group’ led by Harpenden Society members, a number of HCT initiatives were developed, each one promising early progress. Then, as duly featured on the front page of our Autumn 2019 newsletter, a change of responsibility to the much larger, and seemingly more remote, Central London Community Healthcare Trust (CLCH) led to a Society-organised meeting in the Public Halls, where newly-revised plans were outlined.

Though for a year or more they appeared to have constituted yet more empty promises, work on an extensive internal refurbishment of the Red House and its adjacent Halley Stewart Clinic began in earnest earlier this year. The structure of the main building (which dates from 1896) is clearly sound in spite of its undoubtedly ‘tired’ exterior appearance; available funds for a badly-needed ‘wash and brush up’ are clearly a lesser priority.

Walking up the familiar steps and through the Red House’s historic main doorway takes one into what is now the ‘only just familiar’ entrance hall, transformed to an unexpected extent. New flooring and lighting, along with freshly painted walls, lead to the smartened reception area, albeit positioned as before in front of one of the building’s original colourful stained-glass windows.



Above & Below: New treatment rooms



New administration section

Encouragingly, a number of them were already, in early August, 'up and running', that is operational in treating patients. Five of the clinic rooms are assigned specifically to outpatient support for those with long-term neurological conditions.

An eventual complement of more than 50 permanent staff is envisaged. In addition to the provision of health services for the Harpenden area, the upper floors of the main Red House building have since last November housed the CLCH's Hertfordshire operational headquarters, transferred from the Hemel Hempstead Hospital site.

Earlier proposals for the Red House site included selling off part of the land for housing, but those plans have, at least for now, been shelved, the need for a pleasant green space around the revived health centre having been recognised.

The separate Stewarts unit on the south side of the site remains within HCT management, under the auspices of Hertfordshire Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust, dealing specifically with mental health issues.

After the tour of the 'reborn' Red House facility, the Harpenden Society expressed its hope that a longer-term plan for the whole site will emerge, under which the still rather 'bitty' clinical services can be knotted together to create a cohesive health and wellbeing hub of real – and accessible – benefit to the people of Harpenden.



## Constituency link-up with Berkhamsted mooted

As part of a substantial reworking of the constituency map of Britain – aimed at reducing the number of seats in the House of Commons from 650 to 600 – the Boundary Commission has proposed breaking up the Hitchin & Harpenden parliamentary constituency. A new constituency of Harpenden & Berkhamsted would be created, taking in Redbourn, Wheathampstead, Great and Little Gaddesden, Tring and Long Marston, as well as Sandridge and Jersey Farm on the fringes of St Albans.

The Boundary Commission stresses that the changes are far from set in stone and it is likely there will be revisions before they are finalised in July 2023,

and if a general election was called before that date it would be fought on the current boundaries.

Should the link-up with Berkhamsted be implemented, it will be the third constituency upheaval affecting Harpenden since the early post-war period, albeit under continuous Conservative representation. Some 60 years ago Harpenden was part of the Hemel Hempstead constituency, a seat held from 1959 to 1974 by distinguished ex-army officer James Allason. The town was then bundled in, geographically more logically, with St Albans, represented by Victor Goodhew and later Peter Lilley, before the creation of the Hitchin & Harpenden constituency under the aegis of Lilley and current MP Bim Afolami.

## Society subscriptions for 2022

A gentle reminder for those members who do not pay their subscription by standing order that our 2022 subscription ( £10 family/ £8 single ) is due in January. Cheques made (payable to the Harpenden Society) can be sent to our Treasurer at 66 Eastmoor Park AL5 1BW

or paid to our Nat West account Account-no 28772946 Sort code 60 10 07 (which is also the account details for setting up a standing order).

Could all members let us know if their home address, email address or telephone number have changed...Thanks. Contact [membership@harpendensociety.org](mailto:membership@harpendensociety.org)

# TOP SOCIETY AWARD GOES TO TOWN'S NEWEST SCHOOL

The Harpenden Society's prestigious annual Award Plaque for 2020 was presented to the Katherine Warrington School. In recognition of a magnificent development by the Kier construction group, for its innovative building design and its internal appointments featuring state-of-the-art educational technology, all set on the edge of open countryside.

As Harpenden's fourth secondary school, KWS is a major asset for educating the young people of the town and surrounding area, with facilities benefitting the wider community. Society chairman Phil Waters presented the award to head teacher Tony Smith. Representing Kier were senior project manager David Tomlin, KWS project manager Tanya Hammond and project architect Alison Shepherd. Also present was Harpenden Society Awards committee chairman Penny Ayres.

***Pictured: At the Society's KWS Award presentation were (left to right) architect Alison Shepherd, head teacher Tony Smith, Society chairman Phil Waters, Society Awards chairman Penny Ayres and Kier senior project manager David Tomlin.***



## Hollybush accolade for Jarvis Homes

Jarvis Homes managing director Mike Peters receives the Harpenden Society Letter of Commendation from Society chairman Phil Waters, for the company's Hollybush Mews housing development which, in the words of Awards chairman Penny Ayres (also pictured), 'discreetly echoes the architectural styles of the nearby traditional houses in Hollybush Lane built before the Second World War.'



## Society Award for 'Sally Army' Centre

At a Covid-delayed presentation in August the Harpenden Society's 'Letter of Commendation' Award for 2019 was made to the Salvation Army's greatly extended and modernised centre at Leyton Green. The impressive new facility, whose main contractor was Birmingham-based Premier Support Services, was described in detail at the time of its official opening in our Autumn 2019 newsletter. Captain Kenneth Guest is seen receiving the Award from Society chairman Phil Waters and Awards secretary Penny Ayres.



## **Society Awards 2021. Time to think about nominations.**

Nominations are invited, from Harpenden Society members, or from others in the town, for our 2021 Awards. Eligibility extends to imaginative townscape enhancements as well as new or extended/refurbished buildings. Suggestions should be forwarded to Awards Secretary Penny Ayres on [jandpalcock@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:jandpalcock@tiscali.co.uk)

# Stemming the tide of bank closures

The announcement that Lloyds Bank is to close its Harpenden branch on February 23 2022, coming on top of the uncertainty now surrounding the future of Barclays on the opposite corner, because of redevelopment plans for the site, has caused dismay among loyal and long-standing bank customers. Together with the recent closure of the Halifax and Santander branches nearby and the disappearance of NatWest over three years ago, the bewilderment of people accustomed to a convenient and traditional banking service 'with a human face' is hardly surprising.

So how can everyday face-to-face banking services in the town be made sustainable? The Harpenden Society, along with other interested parties – in both the business and private sector – is urging the High Street banks to put their competitive instincts on one side and collaborate with each other as, via credit/debit card use in ATMs, they are already obliged to do.

Such a 'banking coalition' has long been advocated by former director of the Campaign for Community Banking Services (and Harpenden Society member) Derek French, who has drawn attention to just such a scheme, operating successfully as a pilot venture under the name 'BankHUB' in the Essex market town of Rochford.

It is operated under the aegis of the Post Office, but all the main High Street banks are participants. There are five-days-a-week, 9am to 5pm, counter and machine facilities for depositing, change and withdrawals for customers of all the

banks plus, importantly, scheduled days for individual banks to offer in-person 'surgeries', for dealing with queries/enquiries needing personal contact. It means that NatWest provides customers in Rochford with full traditional banking services on Mondays, Lloyds does so on Tuesdays, Santander on Wednesdays, Barclays on Thursdays and HSBC on Fridays.

Derek French says extension of the very successful Rochford pilot, and a similar one in Scotland, to many other towns is urgently needed so that the bank-sharing strategy, already proven abroad, can be available to towns like Harpenden before the critical stage is reached – with all our existing bank branches being closed – which all the evidence suggests is not that far away.



*Lloyds Bank in Harpenden destined for closure next February.*

## Pub's old name revived after major makeover



*The erstwhile Skew Bridge now back to its pre-1997 name.*

One of Harpenden's oldest pubs, which re-opened at the beginning of September after a radical refurbishment, has reverted to its original name. Known as the 'Skew Bridge' since 1997, the Southdown Road hostelry, backing on to Harpenden Common, has once again become the Queens Head (albeit now controversially minus its apostrophe). It is one of the Big Smoke Brew Company chain of 'gastropubs' founded as recently as 2014, when it opened its first pub in Esher, Surrey. The Queens Head is the latest addition to the Big Smoke 'stable', joining six other pubs in south-east England, which include the White Horse at Old Welwyn.

Manager Daniel O'Donoghue says it is hoped to attract clientele with the range of Big Smoke's in-house beers which rejoice in such names as Electric Eye and Cold Spark pale ales, Helles lager and Underworld milk stout. The new Queens Head offers a varied food menu with a particular focus on smoked meat dishes, cooked in the pub's 'smoke room' fuelled by different woods, notably hickory, to impart unique flavours to main dishes.



*Queens Head manager Daniel O'Donoghue – looking out for new customers.*

## INTERNATIONAL EFFORT



The Earthshot Prize on Oct 17 revealed the first-ever five Prize Winners of the most prestigious environment awards in history. Each of the five Winners receiving £1million prize money and a global network of professional and technical support to scale their remarkable environmental solutions to repair our planet and accelerate their impact.



## LOCAL EFFORT

**BY THE TIME YOU READ THIS THE COP26 CONFERENCE WILL BE ALL OVER.**

**Hopefully there will have been agreements for future strategies and targets to help save the planet.**

**Time indeed for all of us here in Harpenden to take some form of action however small.**

**Stop wasting food. Every little bit you throw away contributes to climate change and biodiversity loss.**

**Plan a weekly menu.**

**Buy less food.**

**Use less plastic packed product.**

**Eat less meat.**

**Eat more fruit and veg.**

**Compost your food waste.**

**WHAT IDEAS CAN YOU SHARE WITH SOCIETY MEMBERS?**

**EMAIL YOUR IDEAS BY JAN 15 AND YOU COULD WIN WAITROSE VOUCHERS.**

**DETAILS ON THE SOCIETY WEB SITE**

**[WWW.HARPENDENSOCIETY.ORG](http://WWW.HARPENDENSOCIETY.ORG)**

## Olympic hero Max Whitlock MBE officially launches Harpenden's new multi-million pound leisure centre.

Olympic gold medal winning gymnast Max Whitlock MBE helped open Harpenden's new multi-million pound leisure centre on Sept 24. Max, who won his third Olympic gold at the pommel horse in Tokyo this summer, was born and brought up a few miles from the centre.

He assisted the Mayor of St Albans City and District, Councillor Edgar Hill with the official ribbon-cutting. Joining them was badminton star Gail Emms MBE who won silver at the 2004 Olympic Games.

Customers of Harpenden Leisure Centre, sports clubs, school and community groups were also present at the launch at the centre in Rothamsted Park on Friday 24 September.

They enjoyed a number of family-friendly games and activities including tennis sessions.

Councillor Anthony Rowlands, Chair of the Council's Public Realm Committee who was at the launch, said: "I am thrilled

that Max agreed to come along and open the new leisure centre that we are proud to have delivered.

"He is one of our greatest ever Olympians, with six medals to his name, and his presence was inspirational to leisure centre users of all ages and abilities.

"The new centre is a great asset for the town and surrounding villages as it boasts not only a 25-metre swimming pool but also a learner pool, three exercise studios, sports hall and an 80-station gym."



# DID YOU KNOW?

## From Harpenden's history Still trading after 131 years Claridge & Hall Bros Ltd

The 'Did you know?' feature in our Summer newsletter looked at the long and successful history of the Jarvis Group. But an even longer established company, which started trading in Harpenden 131 years ago in the building business, later diversifying into specialist roofing and decorating, and which remains a thriving concern today, is Claridge & Hall Bros Ltd.

It was founded in 1890 by William Claridge, who lived at 'The Hawthorns' in Cowper Road. He had formerly been apprenticed in the building trade to Henry Salisbury, whose operations were based on a site now occupied by the Inn on the Green in Leyton Road, and who was one of Harpenden's revered Salisbury family which included the distinguished artist Frank Salisbury.

During the early 20th Century Harpenden began to grow, with many houses being built in newly laid-out roads, all of them requiring the installation of mains services, especially for water supply; and C&H duly became very active in those main-laying operations.

William's youngest son Percy Claridge joined the company and, on his father's retirement in 1930, took over the reins of the business. Two years later another building business, H&R Hall, located close by in Cowper Road, was acquired and the enlarged company took on the name by which it has been known ever since.

For many years C&H's workshops and offices were located at 1 Cowper Road, where Hector and Ralph Hall's experience in the bespoke joinery trade in particular helped widen C&H's building trade portfolio. In round about the same period plumbing was added to further broaden the company's coverage of the building trade.

As managing director Percy Claridge gradually enlarged the company to the point where at one time it had over 60 directly-employed staff. Today's chairman Bruce Claridge says the company was never in direct competition locally with the likes of Jarvis. 'We could never have been described as developers', he says. And although the company did build a number of houses, some of them in the prestigious Park Avenue/Rothamsted Avenue area, its growth tended to go in other directions.

That involved a good deal of building refurbishment, for example installing replacement windows in National Childrens Home houses at the Oval in Ambrose Lane and similar structural work at the Bedco and Almagam factories on the Batford side of Harpenden. Central heating installations in a number of large local commercial buildings were undertaken. Rothamsted



The Royd-Burn, a distinctive house built by Claridge & Hall in Rothamsted Avenue for Harpenden JP Henry Williamson.

Experimental Station and, a little further afield, Luton Hoo were among C&H's notable customers.

At a time during the post-war period when a lot of new semi-prefabricated school buildings were being erected, C&H was kept busy installing the steelwork. Bruce adds that relations between C&H and Jarvis over the years have always been amicable, and 'we have in fact been subcontracted by them, to undertake specialist tiling work for example'.

Some of those on the C&H payroll have been with the company for 50 years, though as Bruce explains, the pattern of the construction industry has changed in recent decades and there are now fewer direct employees, with specialist tradesmen now frequently sub-contracted.

But the company is as busy as ever today, with Bruce's son Robert Claridge – the fourth generation of the family – now a director. It has moved its operating base out of Harpenden to a rural site at Markyate. However, much of its work remains centred in and around Harpenden and one of its notable contracts in recent years was the attractive extension and modernisation of Harpenden Cricket Club's pavilion, prominently located on Harpenden Common, which received a Harpenden Society Award in 2019.



Bruce Claridge: 'we've built up our reputation over 130 years'.

# EDITOR'S VIEW

Alan Bunting

## Hospital plans need a shot in the arm



A St Albans resident, writing to the *Herts Advertiser* in September, quite understandably bemoaned the 'huge problems' encountered by himself and members of his family in getting to Watford General Hospital. For people in Harpenden the challenges of travelling to Watford, most notably because of the distance as well as traffic uncertainties on the M1, are of course even greater.

That is a key reason why an all-new and more accessible front-line hospital, on what would probably be a greenfield site, somewhere along the A414 'corridor' between St Albans and Hemel Hempstead, is appealing for Harpenden residents.

We are told the cost to the NHS would be far greater than the planned Watford Hospital enlargement, the completion of which, according to some estimates we might not see much before the end of this decade.

A compromise cost-and-time solution would surely be to 'revive' the number of substantial buildings on the current Hemel Hospital site which have been 'mothballed' for five or more years with their windows blanked off and with weeds growing around them.

Should it be claimed that those Hemel buildings are in such a state of neglect that they cannot be modernised to provide state-of-the-art out-patient facilities, one could point to the recent transformation of the much older Harpenden Memorial Hospital 'Red House' building into a valuable health centre for the town, albeit falling well short of the more ambitious wellbeing facility we were promised back in 2018.

It nevertheless shows what can be done – albeit after prolonged and agonising delays – if there is a will properly exerted against inevitable budget restraints. Travelling from Harpenden to a 'revived' and necessarily modernised Hemel Hempstead hospital would be significantly easier than getting to an enlarged hospital in the middle of traffic-congested Watford, minimising the stress and unpredictability of making

a fixed appointment time.

As an earlier *Herts Ad* correspondent pointed out, the questions surrounding the future of hospital provision in the West Herts NHS Trust area are many faceted, but with projected costs a paramount issue. And it must be acknowledged that the coronavirus pandemic has imposed huge strains on NHS resources, not least on available funding for upgraded facilities. One result has been the perception of a constant 'moving of the goalposts'.

West Herts Clinical Commissioning Group should perhaps look at how similar challenges have been addressed elsewhere in the approach to hospital upgrading over the last decade or more, notably by its adjacent NHS authority, under the auspices of East & North Hertfordshire CCG.

Its mainstream hospital, that is Lister at Stevenage – arguably equivalent in status to 'our' Watford General – received a major £150 million upgrade. That included expansion of its A&E and inpatient services in order to replace those formerly provided by the old QE2 hospital at Welwyn Garden City (a St Albans City Hospital equivalent?).

But, recognising the importance of QE2's outpatient services, ENHCCG invested £30 million at Welwyn, demolishing the old hospital and building a brand new one on the site, which has been widely commended as modern, well-planned and well equipped, with generous car parking.

Even before the Lister and QE2 transformations, back in 2004, East & North Herts NHS Trust invested £8.5 million (maybe equivalent to £20 million today) in the smaller but nevertheless brand new Hertford County Hospital in North Road, Hertford, which provides the level of outpatient and clinical services which those of us in Harpenden had hoped to see at the revamped Red House site.



Welwyn Garden City's new QE2 shows what can be done with a will – and rightly directed resources.

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