

THE HARPENDEN SOCIETY COMMITTEE MEETING
Monday 16 September 2024 at 10.00 a.m.
HTC Council Chamber
MINUTES

1. Present

Jeff Phillips (JP), Martyn Reed (MR), Ron Taylor (RT), Alan Bunting (AB) and Bob Fletcher (RF).

2. In Attendance

None

3. Apologies for absence

These were received from Roger Butterworth (RB), Paul Gloess (PGs), Harry Downie (HD), Karl Wingfield (KW), John Lowe (JL) and Ian Barrison (IB).

4. Past Meeting Minutes

Minutes of the meeting on 8 July 2024, previously circulated, were approved as a true record.

5. Matters Arising from Minutes

None.

6. Treasurer's Report

- (a) The Treasurer's Report had been circulated by HD prior to the meeting. There were no questions raised regarding this report.
- (b) It was noted that the Hustings meeting held on the 17th June cost nearly £1,000 but it was agreed that it had been a very successful event even though the online streaming was unsuccessful because of the low sound levels.
- (c) The other major item of expenditure was the re-branding exercise.

7. Secretary's Items.

(a) Public Meetings:

For the next public meeting the Society have invited Dr. Alison Cowan, the GP Lead 'Thrive Young Person's Clinic' St Albans & Harpenden Locality; CYPMHS GP Clinical Lead: Hertfordshire & West Essex ICS. Unfortunately, the First Responders can't attend the 17 October meeting as they have another appointment on that date.

(b) The future public meeting are as follows:

- I. Local Plan – JP reported that he had a tentative agreement from SADC that a representative would give an update to the state of the Local Plan in early 2025, probably in January. The Society needs to review the relevance of this meeting due to the accelerating timescale of the Local Plan.
- II. Other possible meetings included inviting the CEO of the Community Health Trust to talk about keeping people out of hospital, maybe linking it with the work being done by the PCN, inviting a local farmer (Ian Piggot?) to talk about the constraints of farming in the greenbelt.

8. Chairman's Items.

- (a) The Chairman's report had been circulated to all committee members prior to the meeting.
- (b) The Chairman reported that on the town centre parking issue, matters have moved on following the close of the consultation exercise. It is understood that whilst there may be some signs of movement on SADC's part the Harpenden retailers appear to be digging in on their opposition to any change. It

is unlikely that any pronouncement will be made before the early part of November, as the analysis of that consultation is still going on.

- (c) The Chairman reported that KW and he met with our new MP, Victoria Collins, a few days ago, to give her a further brief on the Society's views on the airport DCO application by Luton Borough Council. She has passed that briefing on to Daisy Cooper, and has also had a conversation with Alistair Strathern, the new Labour MP for Hitchin and North-East Herts. However, it is now understood that the Transport Minister, Louise Haigh, has announced that any decision on the subject will be delayed until early in the New Year.
- (d) AB, JL and JP met with Solum this week for an update on the station carpark project. They were told that following discussions with SADC officials, the number of units has been increased to 120, with units now being built on the ground floor, and a reduction in the number of residents' parking spaces from 70 to 20. Furthermore, there are now no three-bedroom units, as SADC have given a clear message that one- and two-bedroom units are a priority for the council's housing plans. As a result, there is to be some change to the roofline that we had previously seen, but these changes do not alter the overall height. AB has the presentation material that we saw, and we are promised artist impressions of the revised design in respect of the line of sight from the Common, from Carlton Road and from Station Road. However, in discussion about the extra floor for the car park, it would appear that the foundations will have to be reinforced, and there was a hint that those foundations could well take a second storey. Solum's timeline is to apply for formal planning permission in November, and a construction target of four years, with the carpark work being the first stage of construction, along with the improvement to the access from Station Road.
- (e) JP also reported that he had had contact with Derek French to discuss the actions being taken to mitigate the barrier to Harpenden having a Banking Hub caused by the presence of the Nationwide Building Society. Post Meeting Note - Harpenden is now in the list of those towns approved to have a Banking Hub.

9. **Membership Secretary's Items**

- (a) The Membership Secretary's report had been circulated by PGs prior to the meeting.
- (b) We have 495 (was 499) memberships, 4 new memberships, 8 leavers (died or moved away)
- (c) A discussion took place about involving the younger members of Harpenden in the Society. An initiative to involve local 6th formers and their parents was discussed, maybe also involving the PTAs. It was agreed that MR, RT will meet with JP to discuss this in early November. **Action MR & RT to arrange.**

10. **Newsletter Editor's Items**

AB reported that mid-November is the publication date for the Autumn issue. The parking controversy will be one of the items.

11. **Publicity**

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

12. **Social Media**

- (a) The Social Media report had been circulated by MR prior to the meeting. Regular postings are being made to the Facebook and Nextdoor sites.
- (b) The rebranding is now complete including the website. Further position statements have been drafted
- (c) MR reported that, working with Steve Collins of the Photographic Society and RT, the Society has now launched the Photography competition (closing on the 30th November, winners will be

announced on the 31st December, exhibition in April 2025). The press release is completed, the poster and leaflet are with the printer, the website has been updated and the social media campaign has commenced. Currently there have been only 3 entries but it is expected that more will be received as the school term time commences and when the Photography Society advertising commences.

13. Awards

- (a) The Awards presentations have commenced.
- (b) Plaques. July 25 - The affordable homes development at Roan Place, Sept 6 -The new apartment block in Station Approach.
- (c) Certificates of Merit. TBC The new all weather pitch and ground development in Rothamsted Park, Aug16. The extended Silver Plate Delicatessen in Vaughan Road, Aug 23 The upstairs development of the new Dahlsh Ice Cream parlour
- (d) Letter of Commendation. TBC The new house in Moreton End Lane

14. History Society

- (a) The History Society report had been circulated by RB prior to the meeting. Items included:
 - I. Evening meetings programme issued from now to end 2025.
 - II. Number of visitors to the museum varies between nil some days and as many as 12.
 - III. Making most by way of publicity of the new mural in the Station Road tunnel.
 - IV. Conducted first of new style guided walks around High Street.
 - V. In need of Secretary, Membership Secretary, Programme Secretary and volunteers to fill other roles.
 - VI. Trustees have decided to award a certificate of merit from time to time to an individual who has made an outstanding contribution to the study, dissemination or promotion of the knowledge of local history of Harpenden.

15. Transport Working Group

- (a) The Transport report had been circulated by KW prior to the meeting.
- (b) Luton Airport
 - I. The Secretary of State for Transport (“SoS”) has recently been active, asking Luton Rising (“LR”) to supply a range of information. The SoS asked LR to provide a simple table showing the proposed noise contour limits based on “Core Growth” rather than LR’s preferred “Faster Growth” (and greater noise) option. LR, perhaps surprisingly, failed to provide the table but instead sent a 27 page response reiterating its previous claims that faster growth was appropriate under aviation policy and just for good measure reiterating its opposition to any other noise controls (specifically early morning 6-7am shoulder and annual aircraft movement limits). Other requests were related to land acquisition progress and transport where, tellingly, there seems to have been little or no progress towards an agreed position between LR and Network Rail on the ability of the rail network to cope with the additional traffic (and it looks like an answer is still some way off judging by Network Rail’s communications).
 - II. Interested Parties were asked to comment on LR’s response (or non-response in the case of noise). We submitted the attached reiterating our opposition to the use of “Faster Growth” for noise contour limits and also encouraging the SoS to impose other noise controls and financial penalties for non-compliance.
 - III. Following the receipt of all Interested Parties responses, the SoS has today extended the deadline for a decision until 3 January 2025 (last time I reported the decision had been deferred due to the election until 4 October 2024). The ministerial statement said that LR needed

“further time to provide requested information and for that information to be considered, including by Interested Parties, before a final determination can be made”.

- (c) Parking- A response to the recent “consultation” is expected mid-November so KW in his report suggested that we await that before commenting further. However, in line with our feedback to SADC it was proposed that the Society should agree some principles. The following was suggested:
- I. Free on street parking should be retained for 1 hour across the whole Harpenden parking estate (whether you can then pay for a second hour at a charge set at a premium to the car park charge is something we’re currently supporting but I’m not convinced it is necessary to continue that support but there needs to be an evidence base to support whatever decision is made. Visits to the town centre do suggest a high turnover of spaces where parking is limited to one hour or less)
 - II. Residents who visit the town centre regularly should be eligible for a two or three hour permit for the car parks for a modest i.e. heavily discounted charge. Retail employees, similarly (areas for debate include: should it be two or three hours, should leisure centre users pay – historically gym users haven’t had to pay but it’s a bit of an anomaly (no doubt a debate about one hour free still if you can do your class etc inside 1 hour - should retailers pay a higher price)
 - III. There needs to be a rethink about the location of disabled bays – they’re not conveniently located
 - IV. No further encroachment on residential parking amenity close to the high street say ½ a mile
 - V. No new car parks should be supported – some people think that’s the solution but it’s not from a climate perspective nor from a traffic management perspective or an aesthetics perspective – who wants two or even three story car parks dominating the view across town
 - VI. Support for active travel especially safe cycling and walking routes (and safe storage in town)
 - VII. Technology (ANPR) used to enforce parking rules in car parks
 - VIII. CEOs deployed on the streets only with ANPR technology at parking infringement hotspots (e.g. outside Sainsbury’s, on the zig zag lines by the old HSBC, along parts of Leyton Green and nearby) together with limited tolerance of transgressions (zero tolerance is a bit too harsh in reality – some people have been seen parking on double yellow lines along Leyton Road who clearly need a disabled space nearby but there isn’t one)
 - IX. Night-time charges also need to be revisited – people park all over the place (quite legally after 6pm) and it has safety implications – parking close to junctions and also on pavement (much more prevalent following the introduction of night-time charges last year I suggest)
 - X. There is a “no surrender” attitude around but we do need to bear in mind two overriding points:
 - No parking is free it’s just we all pay for it through our Council Tax now but we’re faced with a council who need to raise money and are operating a “user pays” approach. It is proposed that the Society should not challenge such an approach as long as charges are not extortionate (I think the green bin charges are but no-one’s getting excited by that) and
 - It is done in compliance with the relevant legislation.

16. Health & Social Welfare Working Group

- (a) The Health & Social Welfare report had been circulated by IB prior to the meeting.
- (b) Watford Hospital Redevelopment
 - I. ‘Frozen’ new build as the entire New Hospital Programme is under review by the government . There is an increasing likelihood that the ideal complete new build will be deemed too expensive and a refurbishment of existing buildings is more likely. Whatever is decided, the ‘new’ hospital is likely to be delayed until the early 2030’s.

- II. Meanwhile, the NHS has currently prioritised the rebuild of the General Hospital over the possible move of the Mount Vernon Cancer Centre to the Watford site. All this delay is detrimental to patients, and staff in West Hertfordshire.
- III. The West Herts Trust is one of many in England in serious financial difficulty, planning to reduce overall staff numbers by 5%, although some of this reduction is related to outsourcing of the pathology service.
- IV. The Trust has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Herts and West Essex ICB and Dacorum Borough Council, to act as partners in generating an outline business case for a new Hemel Health Campus, centred on Market Square in Hemel Hempstead. Delivery of this project would allow the Trust to sell off part or all of the Hospital site.

(c) Children's Health

- I. Local County Councils are still struggling with a huge increase in referrals to SEND services, and hospitals cannot recruit sufficient staff to provide a timely service for children with hearing difficulties.)
- II. Putting all this into perspective, and relevant to the topic of our public meeting on October 17th -in England in 2023-24 there were 204,526 new referrals of patients aged 17 or under where the primary cause was anxiety, official figures show in 2019-20, the year before Covid-19 struck, the total was 98,953. In 2016-17 it was 3,879.

17. Built Environment Working Group

No report this time

18. Economic Activity Working Group

The Jo Jo Maman Bebe shop has reopened as CREW Clothing for both men and women. The old Good Sports shop is about to reopen as a Travel Agency (TRAVELBAG) and Travel Four Seasons is moving from an office style premises to a shop fronted location next to Ripples within the next 2 weeks. The Forge Boutique on Bowers Way has changed ownership to a local business called SWANNE BOUTIQUE. The BEAUTY/HAIR sector continues to expand with MATILDA MAY who opened Sat Sept 7 in a new venue at the top of Station Rd next to Costa Coffee. Manor Pharmacy will be moving into the HSBC location downstairs with the upstairs planned to be 2 apartments. The Waffle House opened 2 weeks ago and has been busy virtually all the time according to their management. OPEN STUDIOS started on Sept 7 with 125 Harpenden based artists involved, with 18 displaying their work over 3 weeks in the Pop Up shop opposite Waitrose.

19. AOB

None

Dates of the next committee meetings: 11 Nov 2024, 13 Jan 25, 3 March 25, 12 May 25, 7 July 25, 15 Sept 25, 10 Nov 25.

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

The meeting closed at 11.45.