

Can the Local Plan adoption meet new housing challenges?

'Viability' has become a key issue among the many factors affecting the housing targets demanded in the St Albans District **Local Plan**, says SADC Council Leader Paul de Kort, in providing his third update to what is now a decades-old saga. Speaking to an audience of over a hundred

Harpenden Society members and other residents at the Society's January public meeting in High Street Methodist Church, he said the viability challenge was certain to arise when the council came to discuss with would-be developers the revised government target of 27,000 new homes required to be built in the district between the Local Plan's now-imminent adoption and the year 2041 – an increase of 12,000, or 80%, more than the previous Conservative government's target.

Supported by his fellow speaker at the meeting, Paul Zukowskyj, Herts County Council portfolio holder for Environment, Transport and Growth, Cllr de Kort pointed out the likely reluctance of developers to submit large scale housing proposals if their profitability was in doubt, notwithstanding the high property prices in this part of south-east England. It was, he indicated, a question made more acute by the requirement for at least 12.5% of the homes in any large development to be social housing and for another 27.5% homes to be notionally 'affordable' to private buyers.

Infrastructure funding

Then there was the all too often neglected matter of supporting infrastructure, notably highways, schools and medical services, and how the necessary funding would be apportioned between the developer and the

local authority.

To give an idea of the financial challenge, Cllr de Kort said it had been calculated that the now approved development of over 500 homes between Bloomfield Road



and Cooters End lane in Harpenden would require groundwork infrastructure alone costing c.£400k, clearly without allowing for inevitable inflation.

The overall sum likely to be made available for infrastructure development needed to meet the proposed Local Plan was already accepted by both SADC and HCC as being nowhere near sufficient.

Cllr Zukowskyj then raised the related subject of deliverability. The construction industry nationwide had quite rightly questioned developers' ability to actually build the number of homes demanded by government in the 15-year period covered by Local Plans. At the most fundamental level, would there be enough bricks or, perhaps more crucially, bricklayers to lay them?

Article continues overleaf.



Future unitary authorities?

This was an issue which, he indicated, was bound to arise following the major local government reorganisation now planned, which would see Hertfordshire County Council replaced from 2028 by a number of 'unitary authorities', with the yet to be created St Albans City Council and Harpenden Town Council being 'lumped in' with one or more adjacent

council areas. There were suggestions that, in such a reconfigured unitary authority containing St Albans and/or Harpenden, an overall 'social development strategy' would need to emerge. How this would happen remains unclear, as Government has yet to give any guidance.

This reorganisation could conceivably affect the whole structure of SADC's Local Plan in the longer term, but it was hoped that the Local Plan as submitted would be finally adopted this coming June or early July.

'Use it or lose it' issue

Cllr De Kort added that without further legislation to force developers to actually complete construction, it was questionable as to whether the Local Plan could actually be delivered by 2041. The issue of developers sitting on their planning approved 'land banks' to maximise profitability (as is their current modus operandi) could only be changed if a 'use it or lose it' time period provision was introduced into the planning permission.

Another change in the planning system much publicised by the Government is the recent categorisation of some potential building land as 'Grey Belt', which has already been seen in some quarters as an unwelcome easing of existing Green Belt restrictions, Cllr de Kort said it was still ill defined but looked unlikely to affect the status or vulnerability of sites in the district already classed as either Green Belt or 'brown site' land.

However in determining suitable sites for new homes, he added, questions also remained over the matter of density, i.e. the maximum number of dwellings per hectare, as well as their visual compatibility with existing houses nearby or other buildings. Secretary of State for Housing Steve Reed had in any case indicated the government's intention, in scrutinising development proposals, to prevent 'coalescence' of distinctive settlements outside the main conurbations. Locally that would mean, for example, maintaining green space between Harpenden and its Redbourn and Wheathampstead neighbours.

Bad news

As well as raising the previous government's top-down housing target from 15,000 to 27,000 the Government is sticking to, and indeed expanding, the potential for remaining Green Belt land to be designated as "Grey Belt"

This means that developers whose sites are not in the Local Plan, can still use this route for about 18 months more after adoption.

Cllr de Kort cautioned however that the Plan's adoption was, as ever, in the hands of government inspectors who, as we are only too well aware, had thrown up last minute obstacles on two previous occasions. However, the indications are that following the latest round of the Inspectors' public examinations of the Plan, the issues they have raised have in overall terms been relatively minor.

But you never know until their final pronouncement.

He did assert however, in closing, that the Local Plan's adoption could not be derailed by the results, in party political terms, of the local authority elections in May.

Now you can nominate an individual worthy of an Award.

We have had lots of requests to nominate individuals in Harpenden who have contributed their time and efforts to help others or improve aspect of life in Harpenden.

SO NOW YOU CAN.

Remember the Awards are for Buildings and Developments completed by the end of 2025. And now for Individuals who contributed their efforts during 2025.

As examples the Awards presentations for 2024 went to: Katherine Warington School's All Weather Pitch. The Lea Grange Care Home in Coldharbour Lane. The Harpenden History Museum at the Eric Morecambe Centre. Brad & Dills Cafe in the Park to name just four.

AWARD CATEGORIES

The prestigious Harpenden Society Plaque
Certificates of Merit
Letters of Commendation

HOW TO NOMINATE

Send an email with your nomination(s) and a reason(s) why it is deserved to: Ron Taylor, awards@harpendsociety.org.uk

Nominations will be assessed and reviewed by the Awards team.

Closing date March 31st, 2026

Winners will be announced at the Society AGM in May.



Local Government reorganisation and the creation of unitary authorities for Hertfordshire

The last comprehensive local government reorganisation in England was in 1974, which created a three-tier structure of county councils, responsible for highways, education, social services and public health, district councils responsible for planning, refuse collection, council housing, parking and certain public amenities such as leisure centres and parks. A third tier, of local parish and town councils, such as we have in Harpenden, were given devolved authority from the district councils mostly for town assets such as parks and open spaces, although these do not exist across all the shire counties.

The Government's stated policy is to have the top two tiers convert into unitary authorities, as it is believed that these will be more efficient and more democratic, and currently, just under 50% of the population of the shire counties in England already live in unitary authority areas.

The Government has also stated that the parish and town councils will continue to exist, as it believes there is a need for stronger neighbourhood arrangements in the new structure. The Society certainly hopes that this is not political posturing, but will lead to a greater span of responsibilities

being devolved to this third tier from the unitary authority.

However, the Government has not yet decided whether Hertfordshire County Council and the ten district councils would be replaced by two, three or four unitary councils, as it has already been decided that a single authority covering 1.2 million people is too large.

In the Society's opinion, the most favourable economic case would be to have two authorities, as splitting the population three or four ways would be unlikely to generate significant economies of scale. SADC and the County Council have reached the same conclusion.



So, what's in it for Harpenden residents?

In the most recent Forum magazine, our Town Council have identified five potential benefits:

1. A stronger local voice

within the unitary authority as the “primary advocate of Harpenden’s needs”

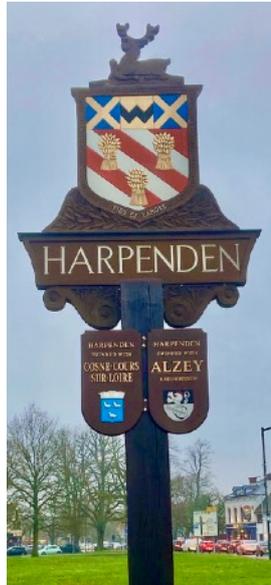
2. An opportunity to take on more devolved assets and services, thereby meeting the needs of the community more directly

3. Stronger local leadership, as champions of the local identity, protecting “traditions, culture and heritage”

4. An opportunity to unlock new investment funding streams and to be the beneficiary of devolved budgets

5. Become closer to the unitary authority in terms of partnership, with the ability to have greater influence in setting policy

This all sounds fine, but the devil will be in the detail, as in the Society’s view, the opportunity to take on more responsibility for assets and services will require substantial negotiation if the economic benefits to the new structure



are to have a chance of realisation.

Moreover, it is critical that in meeting those responsibilities, it has to show a cost benefit to the residents when compared with the current arrangements in terms of the Council Tax burden on our community.

And time is short. The remaining timetable for Hertfordshire is currently:

- Second local statutory consultation runs through to 23rd February 2026 - see the SADC website on Community Governance Reorganisation.

www.stalbans.gov.uk/CGR-questionnaire

- AND a Central Government consultation invites Hertfordshire residents to give their views on Local Government Reorganisation. This Consultation is available via www.hertfordshire-lgr.co.uk
- Paper copies are available in Harpenden Library. This consultation closes 26 March 2026

Next Steps

- Government decision on the model for Hertfordshire by the summer of 2026.
- Shadow unitary authority elections in May 2027.
- Formal unitary authority ‘vesting’ day with full powers 1st April 2028

The Climate Blind Spot in Luton Airport's Expansion Plans



Devastating wildfires, floods and landslides, all of them happening ever more frequently, albeit till now at least, a long way from Harpenden, are widely attributed by meteorologists and climate scientists to global warming. Here in the UK temperature extremes leading to droughts and water shortages in recent years provide supporting

investigation in the autumn, under the title '**Cheap flights – what they really mean for you**', which for many people locally had particular resonance re: Luton Airport. There was a reminder that the UK government had a 'legal obligation' to meet a **Net Zero** limit on CO₂ greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 – too far ahead for any politician today to worry about, one might argue. *NB: Net Zero describes a state in which the greenhouse gas emissions caused by humans are in balance with the emissions that are removed from the atmosphere (mainly absorbed by trees plants etc).*



evidence.

An increasing number of politicians and others in authority, including those, close to home, are committed to expanding Luton Airport operations, seemingly choose to ignore those experts, refusing to acknowledge the statistics and/or the cause of climate change. Some maintain that global warming is unrelated to humanity's continuing dependence on fossil fuels whilst other government officials, in the UK and elsewhere, address the challenge by encouraging, backed by legislation, reduced consumption of oil (and coal). That includes financially encouraging motorists to trade-in their petrol and diesel fuelled cars for battery electric or hybrid equivalents.

However, the stubborn climate change 'elephant in the room' is **aviation**, where the possible substitution of alternatives to fossil fuel on any worthwhile scale cannot yet be taken seriously. That much was made abundantly clear in a BBC *Panorama*

Gatwick Airport has boasted of already achieving Net Zero – on its ground operations. Luton Rising has made similar claims about CO₂ emitting ground transport and other activity within the airport, though that cannot include emissions from cars and other vehicles arriving or leaving. Of far more significance of course, and which airport authorities are more reluctant to shout about, is that roughly 95% of Gatwick's total greenhouse gas generation is attributable to its air traffic. Luton's percentage is likely to be similar.

The *Panorama* investigation then looked at developments aimed at reducing the level of aviation emissions that contribute to climate change. All are commendable but are open to question on their viability, most of all in terms of scale. Civil aviation's emission issue defenders are co-ordinated by a body launched in 2005 calling itself **Sustainable Aviation**, which is described as 'a coalition of UK airlines, airports, aerospace manufacturers, fuel producers and partners' – all necessarily opposing any aviation industry restrictions. Its CEO Duncan McCourt, interviewed by *Panorama*, proved less than forthright, indeed unconvincing, in his assertion that the 2050 Net Zero target would be met.

Members, including Luton Rising, try to deflect at least some of environmentalists' criticisms by conveniently basing their projections on a lowering of CO₂ levels per passenger mile, notwithstanding the fact that passenger numbers are forecast to keep growing, resulting in large part from an expected increase of about 50% in the number of flights in and out of the UK by 2050.

New generation jet engines from Rolls-Royce embodying 'ultrafan' technology promise a 10% reduction in fuel



consumption – and hence in harmful emissions, including CO₂ .

But they won't come on stream until the 2030s. In any case it will be the largest engines in long-haul wide-bodied airliners rather than the 'cheap flight' Airbus 320 and Boeing 737 family jets flying in and out of Luton which will gain the environmental benefits first.

Meanwhile development continues on so-called 'sustainable aviation fuel' (SAF), which Mr McCourt was keen to promote on the *Panorama* programme. In the eyes of the general public the notion of using waste cooking oil and similar non-fossil by-products as transport fuel is entirely praiseworthy. But a closer look at such plans, most critically on the dual questions of scale and cost, reveals its highly questionable practicability.

Trials undertaken so far have been based on just a 2% mix of SAF and 98% regular fossil aviation fuel. It is hoped that by 2030 some jet engines will tolerate a 10% SAF fuel content. But any higher contribution to overall aviation fuel demand looks unlikely, a view compounded by the inevitably limited source

of non-fossil feedstock – from fish and chip shops or wherever! Obstacles to SAF's wider adoption include the cost of collection from multiple small sources – or even it has been suggested from overseas sources as far away as Asia – and subsequent inevitable processing. The *Panorama* researchers found that SAF in production would be two to three times more expensive, per litre, than regular fuel.

If all the developments currently in the pipeline aimed at reducing aviation's carbon footprint were successfully implemented, it is calculated that the cost of an airline ticket would increase by an average of 18%, without even allowing for inflation.



Luton Rising's inability to acknowledge the huge global warming issue in its justification for a near 80% expansion in its operations should be remembered whenever climate change triggered floods, droughts, wildfires and unprecedented temperature extremes hit the headlines.

Eat as Nature Intended: Crowd out your Plate with Veg

Our connection to nature through sustainability, traditional farming, and seasonality has long shaped the way we think about how we live and eat.

Research shows us that including more plants in our diet is one of the most effective ways to support long-term health. However, when it comes to plant foods, vegetables, not fruit, should form the foundation. All vegetables contain carbohydrates for energy, deliver fibre, minerals, antioxidants, and beneficial plant chemicals with minimal impact on blood sugar, making them uniquely supportive of our metabolic health.

Many vegetables also contain natural bitter compounds, such as leafy greens, brassicas, herbs, and chicory. These bitters play a vital role in digestion by stimulating digestive enzymes, stomach acid, and bile, helping the body efficiently break down food and absorb nutrients. These vegetables are invaluable specifically as we age and go through periods of high stress as their role may help to sustain optimal nutrient levels for energy, mood and sleep. Traditional food cultures instinctively valued bitter vegetables, such as parsley, artichoke and dandelion greens, for this very reason.

Timing and preparation can matter too. Raw vegetables and fruit are often best eaten earlier in the day, when digestion is typically at its strongest. In the evening, cooked vegetables (roasted, steamed or boiled) are gentler on the digestive system, aligning with the body's natural slowing down before sleep.



Fruit, while natural and beneficial in moderation, follows a different metabolic pathway. Fruit contains fructose, which is primarily metabolised in the liver. When consumed in excess, particularly through juices, smoothies, or frequent snacking, fructose can contribute to fat accumulation in the liver, increasing the risk of metabolic dysfunction often linked to poor blood glucose control and insulin resistance. Fruit and especially UK grown such as apples, pears and berries versus tropical fruit, is lower in sugar, can have a place in our diets but in significantly smaller amounts than vegetables.

Vegetables are most beneficial when eaten alongside quality protein, such as meat, fish, beans or tofu. This pairing supports satiety, stabilises blood sugar, and provides the amino acids essential for repair, maintenance, and overall resilience of the body. When we crowd our plates with vegetables, another powerful shift occurs, as refined starchy carbohydrates and ultra-processed foods can naturally become displaced. Supermarkets have now created products, which support this shift including courgette spaghetti, cauliflower rice and butternut squash noodles.

A wholefoods, vegetable focused way of eating reconnects us with nature, supports sustainable food systems, and nourishes long-term health for both the planet and ourselves. In eating this way, we don't just follow a trend we return to balance, and to how nature intended us to live.

The Food Teacher™ Founder and Director, Katharine Tate, is an award winning Harpenden based Nutritional Therapist.

Supporting the homeless – Centre 33

The residents of Harpenden have always shown empathy and compassion towards those experiencing homelessness – whether through kind words or the occasional gift of food. What some may not realise, however, is that there is a local organisation that provides ongoing, practical support: Centre 33.

Founded in 1977, Centre 33 takes its name from its original home at 33 Hatfield Road, St Albans. Since 1991, it has operated from its current premises, continuing to grow as a vital community service.

The charity is run almost entirely by volunteers – more than 150 of them, including many from Harpenden, and is funded solely through donations and fundraising efforts.

What Centre 33 Provides

Despite the district's generally affluent reputation, homelessness and social deprivation are a reality here. Some people are rough sleeping, while others live in temporary accommodation or rely on the generosity of friends. Job loss, relationship breakdown or eviction can quickly push people into precarious situations, even if they still have a roof over their heads.

Centre 33 seeks to provide both comfort and dignity. Visitors can find:

A warm, dry and welcoming place to meet
Hot meals and drinks

Toiletries and shower facilities

A friendly chat, respect, and signposting to other support services

Voices from Centre 33

One visitor recently shared his story:

“A short while ago I lost my job, then quickly afterwards my flat. I didn't realise until then how fast a person can go into a downward spiral. Without help from places like Centre 33, my situation would have worsened.

Thanks to the support I received, I was able to get back on my feet, find a new job and secure accommodation.”

And from a volunteer:

“I always wanted to help individuals who appeared homeless but wasn't sure how. At Centre 33, I've found a way to offer real support. Yes, we provide meals, but more importantly we provide respect, kindness and human connection. We may not solve every problem, but we can show people they have worth.”



How You Can Help

There are two main ways to support Centre 33:

Volunteer your time – Help with preparing or serving meals, as often or as occasionally as you can. Find out more at www.centre33.org.

Make a donation – Every pound goes directly towards food and clothing for those in need. Donations can be made via our JustGiving page: **Centre 33 St Albans**.

For more information, please contact comms@centre33.org



Wonderful artistic creations from students at St George's School and The Kings School in the Arts Competition to celebrate 80 years of the United Nations.

UNA (United Nations Association) Harpenden in conjunction with the Harpenden Society held an arts competition for senior school students in Harpenden. The purpose being for students to express their views on what they want the future of the UN to look like.

Entries could be in the form of art, photography, videos, music, creative writing, craft work or any other work of a creative and original nature.

56 Art entries and one written entry were submitted by January 15th.

Prizes of gift tokens from Harpenden Books will be awarded to the winners in the two age groups. A Certificate and gift token in recognition of their work will also be given to every student.

An extensive display of the student's art with their statements of justification for the imagery were seen at St George's School on January 19th by the three judges. Barrie Woolston, owner Molasses House gallery, (above right) Suheil Shahryar, Chair of UNA Harpenden (above left) and Ron Taylor, the Harpenden Society.(above centre)

The written composition will be judged by local author and historian Amanda Thomas.

Winners will be presented with their prizes at a special event in early March. Details to be announced.



Suheil Shahryar, Chair of UNA Harpenden:

I was not only impressed but highly inspired by the artistic and expressive efforts of the intermediate and senior students of the participating schools. This included the research that went behind their entries and their creative understanding of the vision of the UN. It was very difficult to pick out the winners, as they were all winners in this competition celebrating eighty years of the founding of the United Nations.

Ron's Winter Retail Round-Up

Despite UK retail footfall down by 2.9% YoY in December, and high street visits down 0.9% trading on the Harpenden High Street appeared to be busy with several businesses reporting good figures. The New Year has seen some strong performances in January and new additions already here and in Southdown...

a promising future?



Above L2R: New location at Church Green for Harpenden Building Society. How the Banking Hub will look on the corner of Thompson's Close. Concourse repair delayed.



Above L2R: Changes at Manor Pharmacy. The Station Rd front is being sectioned off in a separate unit for a potential cafe. Manor Pharmacy will continue with the Lower High St frontage. The Meating Room have applied for live music & late night opening licence.



Above L2R: In Southdown. LUCA Cafe & Pizzeria to open soon. The Burger Box changing to TOKYO CHOICE with Japanese foods. FREE parking still available.



**Shop Local
all year round in
Southdown
and the
Harpenden
High Street**



Harpenden activities for the young & the old

Harpenden Memory Lane Café

The Harpenden Memory Lane Café welcomes people living with dementia and their families. We offer a friendly, understanding place to meet for tea and chat with optional activities during some sessions.



Every Monday 2-3.30pm

at The Salvation Army
Leyton Green Harpenden AL5 2TG



5th January: Tea and cake
12th January: Memorabilia
19th January: RISE Seated sports
26th January: Tea and cake *HMLC Lunch at 12.30pm

2nd February: African drumming
9th February: Craft activity
16th February: Bingo
23rd February: Tea and cake *HMLC Lunch at 12.30pm

2nd March: Alzheimer's Society advisors
9th March: Therapy dogs
16th March: Chair exercises
23rd March: Tea and cake *HMLC Lunch at 12.30pm
30th March: Easter craft



HMLC Lunch - 12.30pm

Everyone is welcome to our free lunch club which takes place before the Memory Lane Café. Please pre-book with The Salvation Army tel: 01582 469399



Further information

visit: harpenden.gov.uk/dementia-friendly-town or call: 01582 768278



Town Council works with University of Hertfordshire to encourage young people's creativity

Harpenden Town Council has launched a film competition, aimed at under 25 year olds in the town, to encourage and develop creative talent. Working with Howard Berry, Principal Lecturer and Head of Post - Production for Film and Television at the University of Hertfordshire, and Pippa Cawdron from Hertfordshire Film Office, young people in the town are asked to produce a short film titled "What's important to me?".

Farmers Markets

22nd February
22nd March
26th April
24th May
28th June



Please send comments on articles or any other issues raised in this edition to Editor Emeritus:
Alan Bunting
editor@harpendsociety.org
Sub-editor Harry Downie

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