



Autumn News 2022 Founded in 1930

Station area makeover proposed

Plans would include a face-lifted Harding Parade

A major revamp of the townscape around Harpenden railway station, extending down the south side of Station Road, is planned by Hertfordshire County Council, in collaboration with Network Rail. The intention is effectively to integrate Station Approach with the wide area in front of Harding Parade down to Arden Grove, making it more pedestrian – and cyclist – friendly as well as visually more attractive.

If the proposals are given the green light, to some extent dependent on the results of a public consultation exercise, then the extensive civil engineering works involved would get under way during the first half of next year.



In the words of the extensively-illustrated HCC planning document, ‘The main interventions proposed are:

- A redesigned station forecourt providing a new pedestrianised square with trees and space for resting
- A new bike hub with an increased number of cycle storage spaces
- A relocated taxi rank with dedicated pick-up/drop-off area with sheltered waiting space
- Redesigned “public realm” at Harding Parade with flush planters, mature trees, benches and bike racks
- Relocated bus stops on Station Road, closer to the station
- Two redesigned “raised table” (ie traffic calming) pedestrian crossing junctions at the Station Approach and Arden Grove junctions’.

It is aimed to remove or improve a number of current features deemed to inhibit movement (and safety) of pedestrians, cyclists and indeed cars, in the area close to the station. Those include: ‘excessive (pedestrian) guard railing’ around the four-way Station Road/Victoria Road/Station Approach junction; the nearby light-controlled

Station Road pedestrian crossing; the narrow footway connecting Harding Parade with the west side of Station Approach; and the largely haphazard taxi rank..

An envisaged area in front of the station, fancifully described by HCC’s planners as a ‘pedestrianised square’ is designed they say as a ‘meeting point/sitting area for station users, providing an opportunity for seating surrounded by new planting’ and as a ‘gateway to the town’ for arriving rail passengers. Immediately adjacent would be a motorbike parking area. Meanwhile a new taxi rank incorporating a pick-up/drop off space would be provided at the present former bike storage area.

New trees and ‘a variety of perennials’ would be planted around the revamped area, while two existing raised planters along Harding Parade would be replaced with (somewhat non-specific) ‘green areas with semi-mature trees and perennial planting’. The area would include benches and, perhaps surprisingly, bike racks.



Even though the scheme is proclaimed as a means of smoothing the way for pedestrians between the station and the High Street, there is disappointingly minimal reference, in the otherwise comprehensive plans, to the footway on the south side of Station Road, west of the Arden Grove junction, with its ‘bottleneck’ adjacent to the former Post Office.

A revision of the parking restrictions on the north side of the road opposite the aforesaid (road and footway) bottleneck close to the much-used pedestrian crossing, has long been widely but fruitlessly advocated by the town’s road users in particular. And as the highways authority, HCC could usefully have included such a measure in its Harpenden Station/Harding Parade revisions.

Landowner and housing developer L&G strives to exploit Local Plan delay

By putting forward, in late September, its detailed outline planning proposals to build up to 550 homes on 62 acres of designated Green Belt countryside, the landowner, Legal & General insurance group, is clearly aiming to take advantage of St Albans District Council's repeated failure to finalise – and get accepted by central government – its statutory **Local Plan**. Removal of Green Belt protection would, significantly enhance the land's value hugely, resulting in an estimated profit for L&G of some £250 million.



In the likely absence of new SADC Local Plan rulings before the end of 2025, a decision on whether to approve the so-called 'North-West Harpenden' housing development, in the face of overwhelming opposition from local residents, could well be made at Whitehall level, by officials with little if any knowledge of the local environment.

Predictably, an exhibition put on by L&G at the Eric Morecambe Centre presented the plans in the most favourable light, with such upbeat assertions that 'our mission is to better people's lives'. Though how it could better the lives of people who already live in Harpenden is not elucidated in the presentation material. Neither is there an explanation of what it calls, in its wordy and esoteric mission statement, 'inclusive capitalism'.



Earlier public consultations on the scheme (carried out over the last two years by SADC and an independent consultancy) are said to have identified some of the priorities identified by local residents:



- Creating a new community centre.
- New play areas for children.
- Space for walkers and dog walkers.
- Planting more trees.
- Enhancing cycle routes.

No reference is made by L&G to other, more critical, issues which were raised vociferously by residents at those earlier presentations, notably a) the unquestionable impact on Harpenden's already serious traffic congestion problems and b) the significant erosion of the Green Belt which, in the face of repeated assurances from SADC over the last decade, would only be sanctioned 'under exceptional circumstances'.

Likely buyers of the projected 500-plus homes are said to include 'downsizers' as well as younger families. Of arguably tenuous relevance is the associated statement that the Town Council is committed to making Harpenden 'dementia-friendly'. A further assertion is that the new houses would help in 'securing new and better jobs, services and amenities', though just how is not indicated.

L&G's so-called 'master plan': includes 168 'affordable' (editor's parentheses) and 130 retirement homes, comprising 100 one- and two-bedroom apartments and 30 'cottages', all centred on a 'hub' building with its own (unspecified) facilities and services.

The L&G group has, in the last four or five years, diversified its business model to take in housebuilding. In 2018 it acquired CALA Homes, a large housebuilder with Scottish origins now headquartered in Staines, Middlesex. Other subsidiaries include L&G Modular Homes and L&G Affordable Homes, the latter linked to 14 housing associations. An L&G spokesperson indicated that, should the scheme materialise, the construction work was accordingly likely to be undertaken 'in house' by the group, rather than by any local building concerns.



Land Use plan

Planned on-site infrastructure features ‘a community hub overlooking a public square, and including a café and gym’. There would, says L&G, be over 30 acres of ‘public open space’ including children’s play areas and 5 acres of sports pitches with a pavilion. That is followed by the unexplained claim of a ‘40% biodiversity net gain’.

Under the all-important heading of ‘Transport’, the main road access to the estate would be from the already busy traffic light controlled A1081/Roundwood Lane junction close to the Old Bell, with (unspecified) ‘improved pedestrian and cycle facilities’. There would be further access to the northern part of the estate from a – presumably widened – Cooters End Lane.

Meanwhile, one of the most controversial – and, to many, unrealistic – proposals is for the establishment of a dedicated cycle path either directly along the A1081 or via what is described as a ‘quietway’ route to and from the town centre, away from the main road. Tennyson Road could, it was hinted at the exhibition, form part of such a route, notwithstanding its near permanent clutter of parked cars effectively reducing it to a one-way street.



Harpenden Society's response

The Harpenden Society has responded as follows to L&G's invitation to comment on its ‘North-West Harpenden’ housing development proposals:

As a Society, we welcomed the opportunity to study the outline plans. Though they offered plenty of detail, principally on the proposed housing, there are a number of vital issues which it is felt have not been sufficiently addressed:

1. **Traffic.** The proposed 500-plus new dwellings would likely generate up to a thousand more cars on Harpenden roads, with implications for racking up to unacceptable levels, the already serious traffic congestion at peak periods moving in and out of the town on the A1081, which would be exacerbated around the entries to the new housing estate. Such an increase in the car population would inevitably add to the already formidable parking problems in the town, along with a negative effect on local air quality.

Suggestions that residents of the new dwellings should travel in and out of the town **in all weathers** by alternative means, ie by walking, cycling or by bus, are quite impractical. Given the traditional layout of the town along – or close to – Luton Road (A1081), including the obstructive archway bridge at Park Hill, provision of a safe cycle route away from the main roadway is totally unrealistic.

2. **Sacrifice of Green Belt.** At a time when environmental concerns are ever more prominent on the ‘public agenda’, the loss of 62 acres of countryside so close to Harpenden would bring an intolerable level of environmental degradation, to the detriment of the character of the town.

3. **Infrastructure.** The L&G group proposals make minimal reference to the need for supporting infrastructure, by way of health facilities in particular. Harpenden’s three main GP surgeries are already fully stretched in handling the health issues of the existing population. Deletion from the plans of the initially proposed two-form entry primary school in the development remains controversial.

In Summary:

While acknowledging the nationwide need for more housing, the Harpenden Society contends that the L&G group’s proposed ‘North-West Harpenden’ development, notwithstanding its planned mix of large and smaller ‘affordable’ homes, would bring minimal benefit to the town’s housing shortage, those ‘affordable’ units in practice, in today’s property market, being quite unaffordable to first-time buyers in the immediate area.

Cross Lane 'hamlet' plans come under fire

A further encroachment on the designated Green Belt around Harpenden is threatened by a proposal from the Bath-based Lansdown property group to mastermind the building of up to 30 houses on 16.5 acres of agricultural land on the south side of the town. The area comprises two adjacent fields bounded on the north side by Cross Lane, on the south by the Mud Lane bridleway and on the east by the main Thameslink rail line. To the west are existing large houses in Bamville Wood.



Lansdown's vision for the Cross Lane Fields site was spelled out at a meeting of interested parties in late September, at which a substantial number of local residents voiced their strong objections to the proposals. How the hugely increased value of farmland should its Green Belt status be forfeited to allow building development is, perhaps unsurprisingly, not in the Lansdown prospectus.



A planning application, due to be submitted to St Albans District Council by the end of November, is for a 'pioneering 21st Century hamlet'. It would comprise no more than 30 homes 'in a mix of sizes', all to be erected on a 'self build' or 'self commissioned' basis rather than as a single developer estate.

In somewhat esoteric language, Lansdown says they would 'be secured via a range of mechanisms'. At least 40% would be deemed 'affordable' (editor's parentheses) with 'a discount of 30% on the land at point of purchase'.

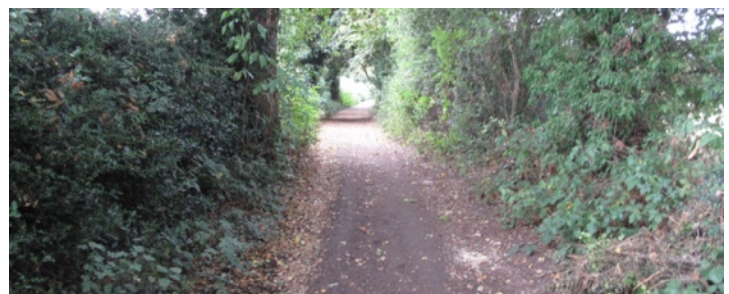
The planned homes would typically make extensive use of what is intended to be rustically harmonising timber cladding. And they would be required to comply with up-to-date levels of energy efficiency, in accordance with a German 'passivhaus'



standard touted by Lansdown. Generous spacing between the houses is promised including such detail as the planting of a fruit tree in each garden.

At a further Zoom meeting of interested parties, it was explained, albeit in somewhat limited detail, how the proposed Cross Lane Fields homes would be marketed, via a 'passport' procedure, setting out for each house the parameters which would have to be observed to qualify for 'passivhaus' accreditation. There was an assurance that a significant area of the total acreage would be a planted landscaped area as, necessarily, public domain.

The main entrance to the site would be opposite no 3 Cross Lane, some 50 yards west of the junction with Grange Court Road. Considerable concern was expressed about the implication of extra traffic in what is a designated Harpenden Conservation Area, along Cross Lane as well as nearby Limbrick Road. Both roads are in places barely wide enough for two cars to pass each other and bounded by vulnerable grass verges.



Mud Lane bridleway adjoins the proposed development site.

In common with the much larger L&G 'North-West Harpenden' house building proposals (see page 2), the Cross Lane development plans contravene statutory Green Belt restrictions and, as such, should in the Harpenden Society's view be opposed as creating an unwelcome precedent.

Remedial work for botched earthmoving in Rothamsted Park

Work has begun on restoring a large part of the 3.2 acre area of Rothamsted Park on which 13,000 cubic yards of spoil from the excavations resulting from the Sports Centre construction was spread during 2020. It was deemed by the park's then owner – St Albans District Council – to be a more cost-effective alternative to transporting it away involving an estimated 1300 tipper-lorry movements.

It was hoped at the time that the prior 'skimming off' of topsoil and its subsequent replacement, on top of the spread subsoil by contractors Willmott Dixon, would return the greensward to an acceptable 'sports field' standard. But that expectation proved optimistic. The ground in many places remained very uneven and the grass re-seeding left bare patches with stones of all sizes having worked their way to the surface.

Hence the need for a fresh restoration programme by Harpenden Town Council, which took over ownership

and management of the Park almost two years ago. The extensive remedial work, over an area destined to accommodate two pitches for the Colts junior football

club, has included removal of 'turf and rubble', in HTC's words, after the bulldozer seen in our picture was employed to achieve an actual, not just proverbial, level playing field. To be accurate it has a very shallow 2 degree downward slope from west to east.

The area has necessarily again been fenced off to allow final stone removal – by hand – and grass re-seeding, with a hopeful expectation that it will be ready for football to play on by the 2023/24 season.



AWARDS 2022

Nominations are invited from Society members and/or their friends and neighbours for the 2022 annual Harpenden Society Awards. Tell us which new building developments or facilities completed in the town during this year you consider worthy of special recognition.

As well as new or facelifted buildings, there are clearly more modest and less prominent developments with visual appeal which can be identified as contributing positively to the townscape.

Please go to the Society website (www.harpendensociety.org) or email to awards@harpendensociety.org to nominate your entries. Our Awards Committee will visit and examine all nominations and select the winners, in three categories:

The prestigious Harpenden Society Plaque;

Certificate of Merit;

Letter of Commendation.



Two possible contenders for 2022 Awards.



Leisure centre and EMC under new management

Against the background of repeated complaints, about sport activity booking arrangements in particular, at the otherwise well-received new Harpenden Leisure Centre, St Albans District Council has served notice on management company 1Life. The termination of its contract also applies to the Eric Morecambe Centre culture and entertainment venue.

A new ten-year management contract, which covers both sites adjacent to Rothamsted Park, as well as six other sites across St Albans City and District, has been awarded to Sport and Leisure Management (SLM). Headquartered in Hinckley, Leicestershire, its operations carry the brand name 'Everyone Active'. The company already manages the Westminster Lodge leisure complex in St Albans.

The contract, awarded after competitive tendering, comes into force at the beginning of November. According to lead councillor for the public realm Helen Campbell, 'the process was rigorous and exhaustive'.

Under the now unified management, residents will be able to use all the district's sporting facilities with one membership card. Users are also due to benefit from an 18-month programme of facility improvements by SLM, including work to enhance the energy efficiency of buildings.

There is a further undertaking by the new management company to expand the 'Active



Communities' scheme, whose aim is to improve the health and wellbeing of all members of the community, notably older people who are less likely to participate directly in sports centre activities.

Employees of 1Life at all the management re-assigned sites are being transferred to SLM which, says SADC, 'offered the most financially advantageous bid and also excelled in terms of the quality of service and innovation'.



Upgraded services at St Albans Hospital

West Herts NHS Trust has announced £12 million of funding for diagnostic services at St Albans City Hospital, to benefit patients across the district including Harpenden. It will provide new CT (computerised tomography) and MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) scanners to be installed, into a reconfigured and refurbished area in the Runcie Wing, scheduled for opening in 2024. The plans follow those already announced for the development of endoscopy services on the site. All the innovations, will says the Trust, support the hospital's role as a rapid diagnostic centre for patients with suspected cancer.



The announcement follows the opening in mid-October of what is being designated as an Integrated Urgent Care Hub at St Albans Hospital. The hub is intended, says the W H Trust, to provide same-day urgent care for health concerns needing prompt

attention but which are non life-threatening. The facilities include X-ray diagnostics. However, it cannot accept 'walk in' patients. Appointments must be booked via GP Practices or the NHS 111 service. It is said that the new hub will be staffed by experienced nurses, and will be open from 9am to 6pm, seven days a week.

The King's School 40th Anniversary Celebrations

Started in Hemel Hempstead in September 1982, The King's School in Ambrose Lane has been a hidden gem on Harpenden's north-west border since the late 1980s. Having lost its original site in Bourne Valley, the school moved in 1987 to its current home on the beautiful Elmfield site, originally built in 1910 as a Sanatorium for the National Children's Home. (See the Spring 2022 newsletter)

Four decades on and pupils, parents and staff – past & present – recently gathered to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the school and to thank God for His faithfulness. There were pupils from the original Year 7 class back in 1982, including Joy Townsend, who has recently joined the school as Deputy Head. Joy helped to organise the successful event and designed the shield on the anniversary mug (pictured). There were whole school pictures on display from years gone by, that many studied trying to find themselves when they looked much younger!

A slide show ran throughout the afternoon, showcasing many of the musical theatre shows the school has performed, along with pictures from mission trips to all corners of Europe, including Latvia and Moldova! More recent alumni shared in the cream teas and conversations too, a final social gathering for some



before heading back to university. The most recent leavers from 2022 were also well represented, celebrating their amazing GCSE results, which included 46% grade 8/9 (A*), our best ever haul across the 40 years of the schools' life. Well done to them all and a big thank you to anyone who has supported The King's School on our journey thus far.

Andy Reeves (Headteacher)



Harpenden U3A celebrates first 40 years

Another local 40th anniversary celebrated this Summer was that of Harpenden U3A, known initially as the Univerity of the Third Age. It was formed in 1982 as a pioneer of what are today over a thousand U3As across the country, whose proclamation is to 'Learn, Laugh and Live'.

Among the more distinguished guests at the celebratory lunch, held at Harpenden Common Golf Club, were the Town Mayor Lisa Scriven and one of the national founders of the movement, 90-year-old Harpenden resident Eric Midwinter.

Harpenden's 180-strong U3A membership, comprised mainly of retired or semi-retired townfolk, holds regular twice-monthly meetings at the Harpenden Trust Centre in Southdown. But more importantly, as chairman Vivien Chandler explains, members are encouraged to join one or more of the 20-plus wide-ranging special interest groups, ranging from 'Art Appreciation' to 'Singing for Pleasure' and from 'Climate Change' to 'Scrabble'.

Details of Harpenden U3A meetings and activities can be found on its website: <https://u3asites.org.uk/harpenden/home>

Help us attract new members

As a reader of this newsletter you won't need to be told the merits of becoming a member of the Harpenden Society – helping us look after the town where we all like to live.

Accordingly, we are always keen to recruit new members. The larger the membership the 'louder' our civic voice in endeavouring to safeguard the town's unique character and ensuring its continuing attraction into the future.

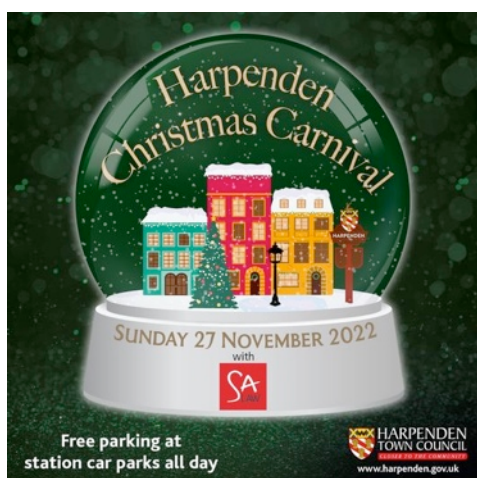
To that end we are mounting a campaign aimed at persuading more of Harpenden's residents to become members.

What we hope you'll agree is an eye-catching new recruitment 'flyer' is being printed for distribution through the letterboxes of non-Society members. And we are seeking your help in getting the flyer delivered, in particular to what we might call 'likely prospects'. That means, most obviously, your non-member friends, neighbours and acquaintances in Harpenden.

So, if you think you could productively get some flyers delivered, please contact our membership secretary Paul Gloess on membership@harpendensociety.org

Christmas fun and festivity for the whole family

Are you and your family looking forward to Christmas? The fun and excitement that only Christmas can bring. The festivities will be starting soon with Christmas products now well displayed in local supermarkets and special window displays in many of the High Street shops. All leading up to the Town's **Christmas Carnival on Sunday November 27**. This spectacular event will be a mixture of the traditional features such as Santa's Grotto, food stalls, outdoor bars, the market, entertainment, the traditional procession and, of course, the spectacular **Christmas Lights Switch On at 5.00pm**.



If you haven't thought about Christmas gifts it could be a good time to check out the offers in the local shops and then returning to buy in later weeks. It's more important than ever to support the High Street businesses who have endured a difficult time competing with internet shopping. Remember they offer friendly personal service, a great range of products, special offers and no delays in waiting for delivery vans.



Christmas entertainment is also high on the agenda with the **Cinderella Panto at EMC from Dec 10th - 30th**. The Jupiter Singers concert (presented by AT Society) at St Nicholas' Church on Dec 3rd and the Mayor's Carol Concert at St Nicholas' Church on Dec 6th.

Plus many more events.



Local bars and restaurants will be offering Christmas Party events and special menus to get you in the festive spirit. All this whilst the **World Cup** is being played from Nov 20 - Dec 18.



The Harpenden Society has donated a Waitrose Christmas Hamper worth £130 to the Harpendia Christmas Magazine competition. (www.harpendia.com) Also supported with five family tickets to the Cinderella panto, a family membership to the Leisure Centre and a Voucher from The Forge boutique. (More to be added by other generous retailers). It's **FREE to enter**, details will be on the Society web site following publication of Harpendia Christmas Magazine on November 20th.

www.harpendensociety.org



Revised Luton flightpaths could increase local noise menace

Those Luton Airport flightpath changes forecast in our Spring newsletter, which could mean more noise disturbance and air pollution for parts of Harpenden, have come a stage nearer. London Luton Airport Operations Ltd (LLAOL) has had its draft proposals approved by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). The next stage is a consultation on the approved proposals, where interested parties will be invited to comment on the options.

That consultation was originally due towards the end of this year or early in 2023. But it will now evidently be delayed to allow other airports in the 'London system' (especially Heathrow) to reach the stage Luton Airport has reached. As they are unlikely to submit proposals to the CAA until next summer, the consultation is improbable before 2024 at the earliest.

Harpenden languishes below Heathrow, Stansted and London City as well as Luton's flightpaths, so the cumulative effects locally of all the proposed flightpaths need to be assessed. To a degree the consultation delay can therefore be seen as helpful.

Relief routes that would take westerly-departing flights (about 70% of departures) to the north of Luton have been rejected as they breach noise constraints self-interestedly imposed by the airport's owner, that is Luton Borough Council.

Crucially, aircraft will in future use more precise satellite navigation and 'sat nav' flightpaths will be more concentrated, so that anyone living under the centre-line will suffer more concentrated noise disturbance.

The key westerly take-off options which have implications for Harpenden have flights either a) passing closer to south and east Harpenden, or b) involving a tighter left turn after take-off and flying over the north of the town. It is intended that those two options would alternate, which implies noise suffering equally shared between say the Southdown and Roundwood areas. A crumb of comfort is that in the longer term departing aircraft will be allowed to make a more sustained, ie steeper, climb, reducing the area of their noise 'footprint'.

For the less frequent easterly take-offs (about 30% of all departures) heading towards Spain and Portugal, which currently fly over Harpenden (anywhere between Wood End and West Common) the options under consideration take these flights over north, central or south Harpenden. There is also an option for these flights to turn north on leaving the airport and pass over Bedfordshire, though not over urban Luton.

Harpenden Society members concerned about the detrimental effects on our local environment of Luton Airport's threatened expansion and the flightpath changes that could mean a double whammy for some, are encouraged to make their neighbours aware of the position, Society membership being an ideal way to keep abreast of developments. The Society will be monitoring this closely as it develops.



Photo courtesy London Luton Airport

Meanwhile the airport expansion inquiry drags on

As this newsletter went to press the planning inquiry into Luton Airport's desire to increase its capacity from 18 to 19 million passengers per annum continued its protracted deliberations. Rival KCs plead their respective arguments with the climate change implications of the proposed expansion – against the background of seemingly conflicting government policies – proving a key issue.

Where 'hardware' has no computer connotations

Described by one of its loyal customers as stepping into an 'Aladdin's Cave', in fulfilling the multifarious everyday needs of Harpenden householders, Southdown Hardware has become the go-to shop for all those items which, a few decades ago would have been obtainable from the lamented C&A builder's merchants in the High Street.

Almost entirely through word-of-mouth recommendation, Southdown Hardware's customer base is drawn from all parts of Harpenden (and beyond). Everyone speaks about the shop not only with approval but with affection, knowing that there is always a cheery welcome from Paul Russell and his mainly part-time staff as well as a good chance of finding items unobtainable elsewhere.

Everything one would have bought from a traditional ironmonger's, notably tools and garden implements, as well as kitchenware and such essentials as light bulbs, paint brushes and an exhaustive list of products that would take far too long to enumerate, are there on crowded display. 'From a tube of glue to a wheelbarrow' perhaps sums up the range of merchandise.

We make no apology for this newsletter giving Southdown Hardware some publicity. It is surely well deserved, if only because a degree of uncertainty surrounds its future. Paul Russell admits to being in his 'early 70s' and the administrative demands of running the business are obviously considerable. The financial burden of business rates nowadays only adds to Paul's concerns.

It should be added that he and his family have long been involved in the hardware trade, for many years as one half of Marsh & Russell, which from the late 1940s ran a number of retail outlets in St Albans and the surrounding area. The Southdown shop originally operated under the M&R name, changing to its now familiar title around 1984.

In line with the adage 'use it or lose it', everyone is encouraged to support Southdown hardware with their custom.

Covid restrictions meant Southdown Hardware having to reduce its opening hours for a year or two to 'mornings only'. But in response to customers wanting their do their essential shopping during their lunch break, the business is now open from 9am to 2pm, Monday to Saturday.



Paul Russell, perhaps Harpenden's most amiable shopkeeper, with assistant Olivia.



Inside the 'Aladdin's Cave' of Southdown Hardware.



DID YOU KNOW?

From Harpenden's history

Tall trees, a boundary wall and an extensive area of greensward are nowadays apt to shield historic Harpenden Hall from view, at least from the perspective of anyone approaching the town from across the Common. However, once inside the ancient front gateway the building's venerability is apparent, especially in relation to the adjacent and strikingly more modern (though now destined for demolition) Public Halls.



Harpenden Hall, pre-1974 home of the town's Urban District Council

It might be supposed that it constituted the original Manor of Harpenden. But no – that distinction is thought to belong to Harpendenbury, beside the river Ver in the north-west of the old parish of Wheathampstead and Harpenden. The earliest recorded name for what became Harpenden Hall was 'Blakesleys' when, in the late 16th century, it was occupied by members of the Cressey and Bardolf families, who also lived at Rothamsted Manor.

During renovations in 1997 an old fireplace was opened up and carved in the stonework was found the name 'E.BARDOLF'. Records indicate that in 1642 Blakesleys was owned by one Godman Jenkyn, a member of the house-hold of King James I. Ownership passed to his namesake grandson. Then, by complex inheritance and marriage settlements, it passed to the Reading and Pym families until, by the early nineteenth century, it was part of the Pym and Packe estate.

It then no longer became a family home. From 1818 to 1839 Blakesleys was a school set up by the Rev. Phillips as a 'dissenting school for boys', run by the Dissenters who were the nonconformist forerunners of the Congregational Church. They built their first chapel in the grounds. In 1821 there were 44 boys being taught by four resident masters.

Then, from 1840 until the 1890s, a Doctor Rumball turned the Hall into a private mental asylum. There is a report that one of the inmates was often seen walking on the Common with his 'keeper'. In 1910, Harpenden Hall



Imposing entrance gate hints at former eminence

reverted once more to its conventional educational role, as 'Miss English's School for Girls' – until 1923. Evidence suggests that at this juncture the building was extended with a south-east wing, extending further towards Arden Grove.

From 1923 to 1931 the building was occupied by St Dominic's Convent School for Girls, and a further wing was added for classrooms and possibly dormitories, before the school moved to nearby Welcombe House in nearby Southdown Road.

As many longer-standing residents of the town remember, Harpenden Hall then became the offices of Harpenden Urban District Council from 1931 to 1973. The convent chapel (on the upper floor of the 17th Century front wing of the building) became the Council Chamber. Meanwhile the Harpenden Free Library occupied the ground-floor rooms of the south-east wing and its garden on the northern side became, in 1938 (amid loud protests at the time) the site of the Public Halls.

In 1973/4, to the consternation of many, Harpenden UDC was dissolved and the town came under the jurisdiction of St Albans District Council. As part of the process the newly constituted SADC became the statutory owner of Harpenden Hall. In a possible attempt to placate disgruntled Harpenden ratepayers, the new council retained an enquiry office at the Hall. The remaining offices were let to other organisations and commercial firms. The Local History Society was granted a lease of two rooms in the old caretaker's cottage at the rear of the Hall.

Then, in 1996 SADC sold a long lease of the whole building and grounds to a commercial firm, Interface, which undertook extensive conservation and renovation of the listed building.

Acknowledgement: Harpenden Local History Society

EDITOR'S VIEW

Alan Bunting

Bank hub hopes – need to keep up the pressure

Under our third Prime Minister in barely as many weeks, and with cabinet members still recovering from their game of musical chairs, our newly constituted government has its hands full with a host of serious issues. Its priorities are unlikely to see the safeguarding of essential banking services near the top of any of their in-trays. But for the man in the street – including Harpenden High Street – and for local businesses, the progressive closure of bank branches that we've always taken for granted is a matter of day-to-day concern which deserves the focussed attention of 'influencers', to borrow a current buzz word.

Those influencers must necessarily include, locally, our own MP Bim Afolami and nearby St Albans MP Daisy Cooper. Efforts are being made to get them on board to make improvements to the government's new *Financial Services and Markets Bill*. The influential charity AgeUK has recently added some further muscle to what is becoming a national campaign, in the interests of older bank customers in particular, where research has shown the importance of face-to-face banking.

While many people are now comfortable with online banking services for routine transactions – typically paying bills – when it comes to less straightforward services, necessarily involving discussion and decision making, human contact with bank personnel is well nigh essential. Any assertion by the banks that such contact can satisfactorily be met over the phone must be derided by all those who have been kept waiting in a musically-enhanced telephonic queue while being periodically reassured that 'your call is important to us'.

So what is the most promising solution to the problem of shrinking traditional banking services, in the face of (we are told) the banks' need to save costs? (It is clear though from the evidence of almost daily television and full-page national press advertisements for the High Street banks, that cost saving seemingly hasn't affected their publicity budgets.)



As bank industry specialist, and Harpenden Society member, Derek French has made clear in previous issues of this newsletter, the concept of bank hubs, each one able to serve a town such as Harpenden, and shared by the main High Street banks (and possibly building societies), has great potential. Such hubs are up and running elsewhere in the country with reasonable success.

For Harpenden, which faces the imminent closure of Barclays, leaving HSBC as the only major bank in the town, a bank hub would make eminent sense. Plans are afoot to turn the present – and historic – Barclays corner-site building into three shop units, one of which



How a bank hub in Harpenden High Street might look; this one is in Rochford, Essex

Picture acknowledgement Derek French

would be an obvious bank hub location. Meanwhile Derek French and the Harpenden Society are keen to get bank customers in the town to continue lobbying local MPs as well as our Town and District councillors to maintain pressure on the Financial Conduct Authority.

Late news: The government's Financial Conduct Authority spelt out, in early October, clearer guidelines on how alternatives to bank branch closures must be delivered as a priority and quickly. Partial closures or permanently reduced opening hours are now also covered. The FCA says the industry must make sure people and businesses who rely on cash and banking services are supported.

Derek French welcomed the fresh FCA initiative as 'very good news indeed' but cautioned that the accompanying documentation is lengthy and any resulting legislation could not be enacted until next year.

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