



Autumn News 2023 Founded in 1930

Healthcare in focus at Society's Autumn meeting

Concerns over the healthcare of Harpenden's growing – and ageing – population through the coming decade were addressed, at a Harpenden Society-organised public meeting in October, by Dr Bethan Rees, clinical director of the town's Primary Care Network (PCN) which was set up in 2019.

Nearly ninety Society members and other townspeople in Katherine Warington School's lecture theatre heard Dr Rees describe the changes being made to maximise healthcare resources locally, in particular by getting Harpenden's three GP surgeries – Davenport House, the Elms and the Village Surgery – to work together in providing the town's 44,000 would-be patients with the best care possible within necessarily finite NHS budget and manpower limitations. Accordingly, in 2022, an Integrated Care Board was established.

'Enhanced patient access to medical services' were, said Dr Rees, at the top of a list of ongoing PCN priorities, followed by 'medication reviews', 'enhanced health in care homes', 'early cancer diagnosis', 'cardiovascular disease prevention and diagnosis', 'tackling neighbourhood health inequalities', and what she called 'anticipatory care'.

More doctors, nurses and ancillary medical personnel were clearly needed, but staffing costs were mounting and now accounted for around one third of all NHS spending. Indirect support was therefore needed. That included 'social prescribing' – to meet people's wellbeing as well as health needs. Harpenden faced above-average demands on healthcare for older (over 65) frail and/or vulnerable patients. Meanwhile afflictions such as hypertension, depression, asthma, diabetes and obesity were on the rise and there was an increase in mental health issues among young people.

Dr Rees outlined the PCN's 'GP Improvement Programme', aimed at 'improving the experience of telephoning the surgery and using online access routes', such as 'optimising the use of online forms via the surgery website and NHS apps', with an enhanced role for surgery reception staff, requiring them to 'capture the information about a patient's needs to be assessed and prioritised'.

At the end of her presentation Dr Rees invited questions and



Dr Bethan Rees: 'Enhanced patient care the PCN's priority'

comments from the floor. One of the most pointed came from someone who said the PCN changes seemed to be designed to prevent patients literally seeing a doctor face-to-face. At a Harpenden GP surgery recently he was told abruptly that he could not make an appointment. Instead he was handed an A4 form on which he was asked to describe his symptoms in writing, including an indication of whether or not his problem was 'getting worse'.

In response Dr Rees indicated that the new system was in its early days and would need refining, while conceding that during her time as a regular GP, she valued face-to-face consulting room contact with patients, often reading a lot into their body language and demeanour as they entered the room and sat down.

But she stressed that the best use had to be made of limited healthcare resources, with patients remembering that in dealing with the symptoms of many routine illnesses, an accredited pharmacy could often be an effective first port of call. In line with the adage 'prevention is better than cure', Dr Rees also made reference to the plan for a 'Wellbeing Hub' as a PCN venture in partnership with the Harpenden Trust.



28 Harpenden sites for new housing identified in Local Plan draft

Harpenden residents had the opportunity to scrutinise St Albans District Council's latest **Local Plan** proposals – set out in a 150-page document prepared by consultants Ove Arup – at an exhibition in mid-September at Rothamsted Research. Council officers were on hand to answer questions, many of which, unsurprisingly, arose from that part of the draft **LP** focussed on future housing development, addressed under the esoteric heading of 'Spatial Strategy'.

All the sites identified in St Albans District are seen as potentially accommodating more than 60,000 new homes between now and 2041 – about four times the present government-decreed requirement – though with some sharing of provision with adjacent authorities, notably Dacorum.

Broader issues are however dealt with, categorised as Economic; Social; and Environmental – all three of which necessarily impinge on the all-important question of new housing provision in the district, where Harpenden's position is critical.

Encouragingly, the **LP** plan document asserts that SADC 'is committed to supporting the **Harpenden Neighbourhood Plan**' with its aspiration to prioritise new housing development on so-called 'brownfield' sites ahead of sacrificing precious Green Belt land. An associated declaration is

'that at least 10% of housing requirement should be met by sites no larger than one hectare (2.5 acres)'.

Accordingly, it is spelt out that 'National policy is clear that before concluding that exceptional circumstances exist to justify changes to Green Belt boundaries, it must be demonstrated that all other reasonable options have been fully examined'.

In response to SADC's 'call for sites' earlier this year, and to some surprise, no fewer than 28 locations for potential housing development are identified in the **LP** document, in and around Harpenden (a few just outside town council jurisdiction, in Wheathampstead parish).

Most prominent of course are the large – designated Green Belt – sites, notably the 62 acres immediately

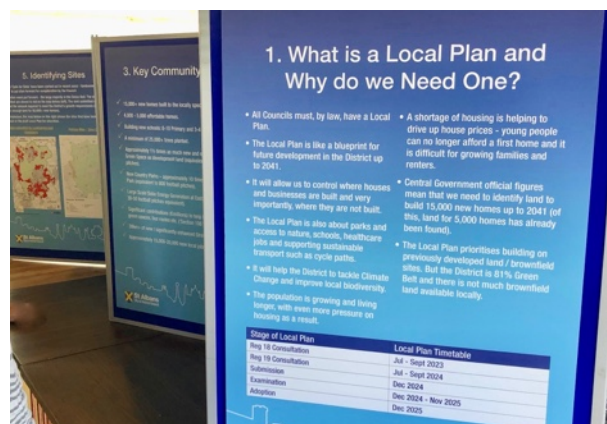
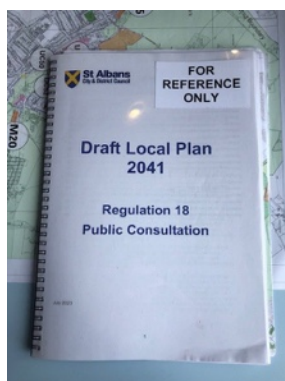
north of Bloomfield Road, where the Legal & General group has applied to build up to 550 homes. However, the L&G application includes an area of land extending northwards well beyond Cooters End Lane. But on the relevant detailed site plan in the **LP** document that narrow lane is shown as the northern boundary of the site, for which a total of just 293 homes is posited on 30 acres of farmland.

Significantly, in the context of the L&G application and in the light of the University of Hertfordshire's 'Transport in Harpenden' report (see page 8), the **LP** document quotes declared UK national policy that 'transport issues should be considered from the earliest stages of plan making'. A supporting SADC assertion is that such large housing development proposals 'must demonstrate a transport network that includes excellent walking and cycling links....and public transport upgrades/improvements'.

Those constraints must necessarily apply to the largest potential site identified by SADC for new housing in Harpenden, for which no planning applications have yet to be submitted. It is to the north-east of the town, adjoining Batford's large post-war social housing development. It extends over 100 acres and is deemed to have a 'minimum capacity' of 762 homes and an accompanying two-form-entry primary school. Vehicular access is inevitably linked to likely traffic issues on the Lower Luton Road which are implicitly acknowledged.

Among the would-be brown field sites which might attract the attention of developers for future housing are Harpenden's industrial areas, principally Coldharbour Lane and Southdown (former gasworks site). But SADC makes clear in its **LP** document that their status as 'protected employment areas' must be retained.

As we have reported in this newsletter over the last year or so, there is pressure from developers to build houses on two fields adjacent to Cross Lane, on Harpenden's southern outskirts. The original aspiration has grown in extent. The **LP** document refers to the possibility of building 95 'units' (ie dwellings) on 16 acres of Green Belt land. Again vehicle access difficulties, to and from the A1081, are acknowledged as a potential impediment.



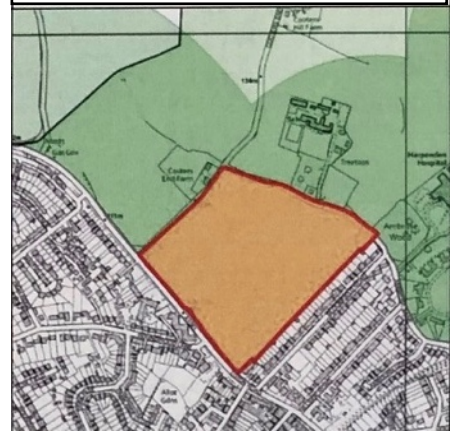
SADC's 'call for sites' has brought to light many smaller would-be locations for new homes in Harpenden. Clearly optimistic land/property owners have seen an opportunity to cash-in on the huge

demand for housing in what some recent surveys have found to be one of the most desirable places to live in the country.

The smaller sites (a mixture of brown and green field designations) include:

- Two separate areas of Piggottshill Lane sewage works site.
- Area of Rothamsted Research land: a 4 acre triangular site.
- Townsend Lane – green site between Hartwell Gardens and Townsend Nursery;
- Beesonend Lane – green site close to Prospect Lane;
- Falconers Field – green site horse grazing field;
- Behind Aldwickbury School – 5.6 acres (in Wheat'head parish) previously identified in this newsletter; for up to 38 units.
- Lower Luton Road, opposite Katherine Warington School.
- Rothamsted Lodge, opposite Manor Close housing; 4.7 acres Green Belt for up to 25 units.
- Redbourn Lane, opposite Hatching Green Close; 1.8 acres Green Belt for up to 14 units.
- Baulk Close, behind Red Cow pub. 1.3 acres for up to eight units.
- Public Halls site in town centre, , being sold by SADC for development of up to 26 dwellings; Conservation Area planning constraints to apply.
- Two town centre car parks: Bowers Way (public) 1.1 acre and Waitrose 1 acre, delivering together up to 37 units (necessarily apartments). LP document indicates that any development must retain existing car parking capacity, via underground or other multi-level solution
- Southview Road, Batford car park, opposite Tesco garage.
- Five further small sites are listed, made up of existing, implicitly under-used, garage blocks adjacent to Batford and Heath Close social housing. Together they contribute about another 30 potential dwelling units.

30 acres of Green Belt north of Bloomfield Road



2.9 acres at Falconers Field



Over 100 acres of Green Belt to north-east of Batford



Town Council votes to drop L&G and Cross Lane sites from Local Plan

At a Harpenden Town Council meeting on the SADC **Local Plan** presentation, HTC councillors pronounced judgment on its implications, especially on housing, in the context of the town's **Neighbourhood Plan**.

Opinions were divided on the relative merits of building on the large number of identified sites. It was nevertheless regretted that minimal reference was made to such vital issues as parking, transport access, mains services and lack of any infrastructure detail, critically apparent in regard to the 'L&G' site north of Bloomfield Road and that at Cross Lane.

A majority of the 15 HTC councillors present voted in favour of a recommendation to SADC planners that those two sites (for which planning applications had already been made) be removed from the definitive **Local Plan** before its Submission to the Secretary of State for approval – or rejection.

New charity set to acquire Kinsbourne Green Common

Plans have been announced for the ownership of most of **Kinsbourne Green Common** to be acquired, at a price thought to be £150,000, by what would be a newly-established charity, aimed at securing its future as a popular, much loved area of public open space. The only parts of the Common not included in the transaction are those areas in front of those properties on the west side of the Common which have been purchased in recent years by the property owners.



The Common has been in the ownership of the Pigott family, best known locally as owners of Thrales End Farm over two generations, for almost 50 years and who had earlier intended its 50 acres to be sold at auction in September.

But following the local initiative, led by residents Sue Archer, Marcus Whitehead and Tim Wright, to establish '**Friends of Kinsbourne Green**

Common' as a registered charity, the intention was changed and the vendor family declared: 'We are delighted to

be handing over the stewardship of Kinsbourne Green Common to such an exciting newly-formed community group, who are interested in protecting and maintaining it on behalf of the local community, so that it can continue to be enjoyed for generations to come'.



Meanwhile, Kate Sheffield, Chair of Harpenden Rural Parish Council said:

'I have been overwhelmed by the positivity and team spirit shown by local residents. This is something we should all celebrate, as I believe it will help to bring our wonderful community even closer together'.

She adds that the aim is to maintain the land in its current state and going forward, to work to further improve its rich biodiversity and ensure it is



accessible to all.

Anyone willing to pledge a charitable donation towards the land purchase and ongoing maintenance of the common, or to help in setting up or running the charity, should email friends@kinsbournegreencommon.org.uk.



Amenbury Lane car park priority rumpus

With no advanced warning to users of Amenbury Lane car park – or to Harpenden Town Council – its capacity for the general public was abruptly reduced in September by 30 spaces. In busy periods of the week, drivers suddenly found it much more likely that there were no available spaces and were forced to look elsewhere to park – in nearby streets if they were lucky.

The explanation was that St Albans District Council, the operator of nearby Harpenden Leisure Centre, had made what appeared an arbitrary decision to make a significant number of car park spaces, with accompanying signage, for leisure centre staff only.

It was brought up as an urgent issue for discussion at HTC's September 25 meeting, where it was emphasised that the town council had at no point been consulted. Councillors were vociferous in condemning the measure. Among the milder criticisms was that from Cllr David Heritage who described the number of reserved spaces as 'over provisioned'.

SADC had responded to initial complaints with a pledge that usage of the car park spaces by entitled users was 'being monitored'. An early assessment was said to have put average usage at 39%.

Harpenden Society chairman Jeff Phillips, on behalf of a number of its members who had criticised the measure, pointed out that 'to add insult to injury,



these reserved spaces are positioned immediately inside the car park entrance' (illogically furthest from the leisure centre), making things that little bit more arduous for shoppers and others hoping to park near to the High Street.

Mr Phillips suggested that there were more obvious ways to prioritise car parking for leisure centre staff, by means of windscreen stickers for example. He questioned why, in any case, leisure centre staff should not have to face the same parking challenges as shop and office workers in the town.



A bench has been installed, near the baa-lamb trees on Harpenden Common, dedicated to the memory of Mike Waddilove, enthusiastic long-time member of the Harpenden Society and a St Albans District Councillor from 1998 to 2007. His wife Pauline, here checking the bench for comfort, says that as a former town planner he was focussed particularly at SADC on planning and environmental issues, with the related

monitoring of planning applications for the Harpenden Society. He was also active in STACC, the campaign aimed at encouraging cycling and the establishment of cycle paths in the district.





You may have noticed the installation of Christmas lights around the town in recent weeks in anticipation of the **Christmas Carnival and Lights On Event for Sunday Nov 26**. Always a wonderful occasion for families to enjoy the Christmas festivities and for Retailers to welcome you to start your Christmas shopping.



Harpenden Town Council have set the scene with a range of activities. The Carnival is always a magical occasion with plenty of entertainment, activities, food

and drink, outdoor bars and music as well as the Christmas Farmers Market, fairground rides and lights switch on.



This year's procession theme is **"Homemade Magic of Christmas"** - creative

interpretations are encouraged! Dress up, have fun and promote your group while offering some old-fashioned fun. The Mayor will select a winner of Best Dressed and award a £100 voucher of the winner's choice. **The Mayor's Christmas Card** competition is a competition for 4-11 year olds. Create your masterpiece for the Mayor of Harpenden to use as her official seasons greetings card to be in with a chance of switching on the Town's Christmas lights!

The Panto is another big attraction for families. **Beauty and the Beast** from Dec 9th to 30th at the Eric Morecambe Centre.



Our **Town Mayor Councillor Fiona Gaskell** is a great supporter of 'Shopping Locally' and I met her a few weeks ago to visit some of our High Street Independent shops to see what they would be offering this Christmas. We started our mini trip at **Threads**, meeting owner Lara Wares.



Stepping inside was a wealth of Christmas decorations. Lara explained that lots more gift ideas would be added in the coming weeks. Next Door was **Perry Florist**, another long established Independent, famous for their offerings of Christmas wreaths. And finally to **Lister Interiors** where an

extensive range of Lights and Cushions could be added to anyone's Christmas 'Wish List'.

The **Harpenden High Street** and the **Southdown shops** offer an amazing range of shopping experiences and hospitality too with delicious Christmas Fayre to set your taste buds on edge. There are also three Art Galleries to tempt you.



The Lights will bring a magical feeling to the Town so please make every effort to do your Christmas shopping in Town and support all the shops inc the Charity ones as well.

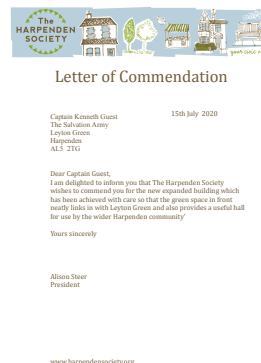
Batford Lights On with carols, delicious refreshments and exciting craft activities; a traditional Batford Christmas celebration on **30th November!**

Southdown Lights and Lanterns. An exciting event for Southdown locals which will include stalls, Santa's grotto, carols, fun fair, lantern parade and more. See you there on **1st December!**

Ron Taylor



WHAT ARE YOUR FAVOURITES FOR 2023? ARE THEY WORTHY OF AN AWARD?



THREE PREVIOUS WINNERS BELOW TO SHOW EXAMPLES OF NOMINATED DEVELOPMENTS



HOW TO NOMINATE YOUR FAVOURITES FOR 2023

Look around Harpenden and see what is being built or developed to completion by the end of 2023.

There should be some merit in what has happened with real benefits to the Town and the local community, whether they be a large number of residents or a smaller active group. So NOT just an attractive looking building BUT something more significant.

FULL DETAILS ON THE WEB SITE:

www.harpendensociety.org

***If you have already decided
what your nomination (s) are
then scan the QR code here to go
straight to the Nomination Form***



Addressing Harpenden's transport challenges

'Harpenden Transport – getting out of the Jams' was the title of a presentation by Stephen Joseph, head of the University of Hertfordshire's **Smart Mobility Unit**, at the **Harpenden Society's** Autumn public meeting, based on a detailed 15-page **SMU** report commissioned by the Society.



An audience of almost a hundred Society members and other town residents at Katherine Warington School heard Mr Joseph's analytical assessment of what were Harpenden's widely-acknowledged and seemingly intractable transport-related problems, namely traffic congestion, air pollution and parking, with proposals for a number of potential solutions.



Congestion was, he said, an inevitable factor detracting from air quality; and despite Harpenden being thought of as a country town, measurements taken in Church Green – a 'congestion hotspot' – indicated a pollution level among the worst third in the country, a consequence in part of local high car ownership (1.38 cars per household).



He reminded his audience that excessive small-particulate air pollution arising from vehicle congestion was linked to heart disease, asthma and dementia, and was generated by tyres and brakes as well as exhausts.

A separate, but inevitably linked, vehicle emissions concern was that of climate change. Petrol and diesel engined vehicles contributed over 30% of the UK's carbon dioxide global warming emissions. And the SMU study indicated that CO₂ car emissions in Harpenden (per head of population) were some 68% higher than the national average.



Discouragement of car use, as a means of cutting congestion and pollution, was made more difficult, the SMU report pointed out, by recent reductions, in real terms, of the cost of motoring, while bus and rail travel had become more expensive. Mr Joseph lamented the fact that Hertfordshire had, in recent times, suffered the biggest cuts in bus services (including the 366 route linking Harpenden and Welwyn Garden City), turning more people to car use.



Not surprisingly he advocated more cycling and walking by those wanting to get into the town centre and to Harpenden Station, while recognising that there was no coherent strategy and it was logistically impractical for many people on the outskirts, including possible future residents of the proposed L&G development north of Bloomfield Road.

Cycling could nevertheless be encouraged through a local bike hire scheme of the kind established, with variable success, elsewhere in the country, including Watford. The evolution of battery-powered 'e-bikes' had the potential of extending the practicality of pollution-free cycling over longer distances. He cautioned however that cycling, as an alternative means of local travel, which would potentially alleviate congestion (and therefore pollution) in the town was too often discouraged by would-be cyclists' safety concerns.



Where there was no viable alternative to car use, Mr Joseph posited, in avoiding wasteful single-occupancy, car sharing or, a step further, 'car clubs' where ownership (or leasing) was shared. As a step in that direction he cited short-term-rental car schemes already in place nearby in St Albans and Luton, with Harpenden Station being an obvious local base.

He also suggested larger employers in the area could play their part by providing communal staff bus services along the lines already provided by some schools and with the successful Hatfield-based UNO bus service as a model.

School travel offered scope for a variety of useful solutions, including so-called 'walking buses' for primary schools, which met parents' obvious concerns about childrens' safety, as did 'school streets' – streets around schools which were closed to traffic at the busy morning and afternoon drop-off/pick-up periods.

He conceded that traditional public transport, principally bus services, had their shortcomings re: cost, availability and frequency. But there was



potential for improvement, possibly by way of what he called 'responsive transport', as already available in parts of North Herts, which he

suggested could be an evolution of the current hail-and-ride Harpenden Hopper minibus service.

Under the heading of 'Street Space and Parking' the SMU report pointed to ways of providing more space in Harpenden town centre for 'buses, pedestrians and cyclists' (in that order) by reviewing car access to Bowers Parade and Lower High Street, and consideration of a wider 20mph speed limit. Unsurprisingly the report called for tighter enforcement of current on-street parking restrictions.



In its conclusions, the report asserted that congestion and high levels of car use in Harpenden were not inevitable. But choices had to be made on the priority use of road space. It suggested a 'Harpenden Transport Partnership or Forum' could be established to carry forward some of its proposals with a view to their being debated more widely – by implication with local authority involvement.



Stephen Joseph (left) with Harpenden Society chair Jeff Phillips

could be established to carry forward some of its proposals with a view to their being debated more widely – by implication with local authority involvement.

Airport expansion – the Society’s objections submitted

In line with the undertaking given in our Summer newsletter, on the plans to increase Luton Airport’s annual passenger capacity by nearly 80%, the Harpenden Society submitted its detailed (necessarily written) evidence to the official Expansion Inquiry – which is scheduled to finish next February.

In summary it covered the vitally important issues of climate change, noise, the questionable need for the development and the not inconsiderable matter of funding. The Society proposed that, if the development was given the go-ahead, it would have to be compliant with the terms proposed by the Government’s Committee on Climate Change (CCC), in its June 28 2023 report to Parliament, which stated that ‘No airport expansions should proceed until a UK-wide capacity management framework is in place to annually assess and, if required, control, sector greenhouse gas and non-CO2 effects’

Increasingly frequent reports of the devastating effects of global warming, notably temperature extremes, flooding and storm damage across the world impacting ordinary lives, serve as a reminder for measures addressing climate change to be intensified, with a curb on aviation – rather than growth – as an all too obviously sensible and measured step.

On the long-standing issue of aircraft noise emanating from flights in and out of Luton Airport, the Society’s submission to the Inquiry demonstrated conclusively that, contrary to some defensive claims that have been made, the projected capacity expansion plans, to 32 million passengers per annum (ppa), would not be accompanied by any reduction in noise disturbance for communities such as Harpenden.

Indeed, Luton Rising, the airport operator, concedes that the noise limits it proposes to accompany the projected 32mppa would remain at a higher level than the long-term noise limits agreed when the airport’s application to grow to its present 18mppa capacity was approved in 2014. The Society urged the Inspectors to require, at a minimum, those noise limits – by definition ‘long term’ – to be met, allowing the commendable noise reductions achieved in aircraft and aero engine technology advances to benefit affected communities.

Finally, the Society felt obliged to comment on the expansion proposal’s highly speculative nature, offering few demonstrable economic benefits to offset the unavoidable environmental damage created. Furthermore



we argued that there was no evidence to suggest that either Luton Rising or Luton Borough Council could fund the development or that a third party investor would come forward to underwrite such a massive project. The formidable cost implications of the airport’s recent horrendous multi-storey car park fire cannot have encouraged projected investment plans.



Costs arising from multi-storey car park fire could deter investors.

Regrettably, recent statements by the Prime Minister suggest that the Government will not heed the CCC’s advice but, as the Inquiry progresses through a number of deadlines and issue-specific hearings, ours and other community concerns and local authority are being addressed by the five Government appointed inspectors. The Harpenden Society will continue to reinforce its detailed position throughout. The Inquiry is required, by law, to close on February 10 2024 and the Inspectors then have three months to report to the Secretary of State who, in turn, has three months to grant or refuse Luton Rising’s application.

As was widely reported in early October, the airport’s 19 million ppa expansion application, that was referred to the two Secretary of States, was regrettably approved on 13 October. Potentially this will increase, temporarily, noise over Harpenden, however, it is not clear presently whether the proposed growth will materialise before a decision is made on Luton Rising’s application (which would see the earlier planning permissions revoked).



Where comfort meets style



Nick Lister: 'Post Covid the business has thrived'

Anyone needing one or two additional cushions to enhance the comfort of their lounge could do worse than reviewing what is an astonishing off-the-peg range – varying in size, shape, fabric design and undoubtedly softness – on display in Lister Interiors. And should there by any chance be nothing in stock to appeal to the scrupulously-particular customer, the company will readily put together a bespoke specification. Needless to say its eye-catching shop in Leyton Road, directly opposite Waitrose, offers far more than cushions in its comprehensive range of furnishings, much of it customised to individual client's taste and needs.

As the eponymous owner of the business, Nick Lister explains, off-the-shelf furnishing items account for a relatively small part of what has become a shining example of Harpenden's independently run retail scene. Greater emphasis is on tailoring interior designs, by way of furnishing detail and often layout as well – for any or every room in a house including, occasionally, the kitchen and bathroom – to what can often be a client's 'rough sketch' ideas.

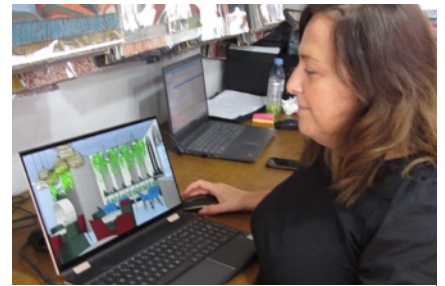
Typically, such a design-and-supply assignment can include hard and soft furniture (not forgetting those aforementioned cushions), curtains, wall-coverings and, importantly, lighting. Carpet supply may or may not be included in a Lister quotation, Nick pointing out however that nowadays it is difficult to be price competitive against the big-name national carpet companies with their bulk-buying power.

Upholstery is inevitably a word that comes up in Lister Interiors' discussions with customers, not just in the supply of new lounge furniture but in what amounts to the company's 'interior refreshment' business, where people's cherished sofas or armchairs can be re-upholstered to give them a new lease of life and where Lister regularly employs the skills of Hunter Knight Upholstery, a respected company based in Nottingham.

Needless to say, choice of fabrics, for upholstery, curtains and other furnishings is likely to be integral to many Lister Interiors client projects. The shop therefore abounds with swatches offering sample materials in a host of different categories. Nick says his customers are able to choose from up to 100,000 (yes, a hundred thousand) fabric materials and designs for every conceivable furnishing application.

Quite naturally, those Lister customers embarking on an interior space refurbishment or planning the layout of a room in a new house might be apprehensive of how it would look 'in the flesh'. By way of providing such an insight, the company is now able to show the client the proposed ready-furnished space, complete with such details as suspended lighting – in three dimensions, viewable from different angles on a laptop screen – thanks to a tailored computer program expertly managed by staff member Nancy Cusenza.

It was in 2012 that the shop was established by Nick's father David – hence the initial name of 'David Lister Interiors', which on

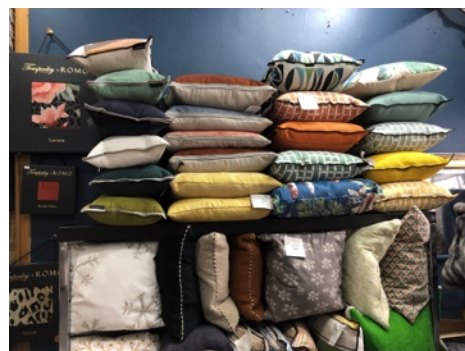


Nancy Cusenza's CAD skills bring potential interiors to life

David's retirement was simplified to its present name. Nick admits that business was difficult through the Covid period, making advisory client home visits virtually impossible. But the Lister Interiors name was kept in people's minds, not least because of the shop's prime position in Harpenden, especially for shoppers emerging from Waitrose.

Post Covid, the business has continued to thrive, and with its customer base having evolved demographically, says Nick. A significant number are, he says, relatively recent Harpenden incomers, typically ten years or so younger than the company's

traditional clientele, often with young families, wanting to make their new homes as attractive and comfortable as their budgets allow.



Cushion buyers could be spoilt for choice!

EDITOR'S VIEW

Alan Bunting

Hopes rise of a Bank Hub for Harpenden



The prospect of us getting that much vaunted Bank Hub now appears marginally brighter, Harpenden being one of the 27 towns recently listed optimistically by the 'Daily Mail' and the respected 'This Is Money' financial website as potential new Hub locations. It follows the withdrawal from the scheme of the Nationwide Building Society, whose presence in the High Street had effectively blocked the town's Hub aspirations.

Harpenden-based banking guru Derek French cautions however that several bridges remain to be crossed, involving Cash Access UK (a 'Hub promoting' not-for-profit company owned by the major banks) and LINK, the ATM operator network.

There also of course remains the crucial question of a suitable site, necessarily in the town centre, where a Hub could be located. There are currently no obviously available premises, bearing in mind the substantial floor area needed, more or less equivalent to that of a traditional bank branch.

While we wait in hope – following a vigorous campaign backed by the Harpenden Society, the Town Council and others – for a full Banking Hub to 'get the green light', a number of 'sticking plaster' alternative but limited banking services are being put in place.

Following the closure of HSBC's branch in July, it has submitted plans for what it calls a 'cash pod' occupying a part of its corner site fronting Station Road. It would comprise an ATM (automated cash machine) with the enhanced facility of enabling HSBC customers to deposit as well as withdraw money, while also providing a cash withdrawal service for non-HSBC UK customers.

Criticisms have been levelled at its siting, on the narrow and crowded pavement close to the

Station Road pedestrian crossing. It should be added that the timetable for getting HSBC's 'cash pod' up and running is partly reliant on SADC planning approval.

Meanwhile, following the more recent closure of its High Street branch, Barclays is providing a useful ongoing face-to-face service, able to deal with customers' problems and queries, albeit on Tuesday and Friday mornings only, from 9.00am to 12.30pm, in a room made available by High Street Methodist Church. It must inevitably be seen as a temporary facility, though it is clear that its future must depend on its level of customer usage, as well of course, on the progress made in obtaining what so many Harpenden bank customers really want – a fully-functional Banking Hub.



The now-empty HSBC building, where the 'cash pod' is projected to occupy just part of the site, facing the crossing at the bottom of Station Road.

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Designed by Ron Taylor
Published by The Harpenden Society, printed by
D2D, Harpenden and distributed by hard-working
Society members.