

THE HARPENDEN SOCIETY ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
Thursday 29th March 2012 at 8.00 p.m. in Park Hall, Leyton Road.
MINUTES

1. President's Address

The President, Ian Fulton, welcomed everyone to the AGM. He announced that after 20 interesting and enjoyable years as the president of the Society he had decided now was the time to hand over to a younger person. He stated that after a period where he thought that the Society might have to close down he was pleased to report that he is handing over to a vibrant and enthusiastic committee and the Society is now revived and flourishing.

Richard Thomas thanked the President for his many years of service to the Society, describing how Ian's illustrious public service career had started 50 years ago when he was elected as the youngest councillor on the then Urban District Council followed by founding the Town Council 40 years ago and becoming its first mayor. Richard Thomas presented the President with a small gift to thank him for his outstanding contribution to the success of the Society.

2. Apologies for absence

Councillor Teresa Heritage, Mr & Mrs Ken Jenkins, Mrs Margaret Bradbury. Committee Members, Arnold Allen, Steve Gledhill & Vicky Evans.

3. Minutes of the AGM of the 25th March 2011.

The minutes of the 2011 AGM were approved.

4. Treasurer's Report:

The Treasurer's Report, copies of which had been provided throughout the hall, was presented by the Chairman. The Society's reserves currently exceed £11,000. In light of the Society's increased level of activity it is anticipated that this reserve will be gradually reduced over the next two years to a level of around £5,000.

Acceptance of the Treasurer's report was agreed unanimously.

5. Chairman's Annual Report

The Chairman reported that a year ago, when he was asked to take on the chairmanship of the Society, he found that although the Society had many strengths, such as its history, its dedicated committee members, its many loyal helpers and its good relationship with the Town and District Councils, there were also some major weaknesses. Chief among these were lack of clarity of purpose, committee members working by themselves on their own specialist interest areas with no collective vision, very low awareness of the Society by most of Harpenden's residents, an ageing membership and a reluctance to embrace modern communications technology.

Therefore on June 13th 2011 members of the committee took part in a workshop to consider the purpose of the Society, how it might be structured to work more effectively and what were the priority actions. The main outcomes agreed were:

- a) That the purpose of the Society is to be a non-political civic voice promoting the well-being of the Town in all its aspects.
- b) There should be a membership drive.
- c) The Society should target especially younger Harpenden residents i.e. under 65s!

- d) Apart from the now rejuvenated 'Harpenden Society News', our preferred communication both between committee members and with the membership should as far as possible be by e-mail and that the web site should be updated, and actively managed with regular updates.
- e) The Society should publicise the Society's activities more actively.
- f) The Society should build relationships with many of the other voluntary organisations serving the interests of the town.
- g) Our public meetings should focus on issues affecting the Town.
- h) Specific issues might then need to be followed up in appropriate ways.
- i) The main work of the committee should be reorganised into seven activity working groups, each led by a convenor on the committee who would be supported by a network of Society members with interest and expertise in the respective issues. These are:
 - Public order: e.g. police matters, neighbourhood watch, fire service
 - Environmental issues: e.g. aircraft noise, pollution issues, recycling, refuse collection, etc.
 - Transport: e.g. trains, buses, taxis, traffic control, parking
 - Health and social welfare: e.g. general practices, hospitals, public health matters, day and residential care, etc.
 - Education and Leisure: e.g. schools, leisure and sports facilities, access to footpaths and countryside, civic halls, entertainment & arts
 - Built environment: e.g. planning, housing, design and layout of buildings, street furniture, civic gardens, road maintenance, etc.
 - Economic activity: e.g. shopping and commercial services, state of the High Street, companies located in Harpenden, business and work opportunities.

Six Working Groups are now up and running. Only Transport currently lacks a convenor and we are hopeful of filling that vacancy shortly.

Membership

On 13 February the Chairman reported that the Society had 239 single and 407 family memberships. Counting family members as 2 people each, that makes a total membership of 1050 members. In 2011 the Society had 76 new members, as against only 21 in 2010. The Society's membership secretary, Barbara Ouston, deserves special thanks for her tireless work dealing with all the membership issues, including computerisation and moving as many payments as possible to standing order payments.

Targeting younger age groups

An informal group (named Pulse) of mainly 'young mums', convened by a committee member, meets periodically with the Chairman to raise issues. Meetings have also been held with the Harpenden Parents Group and the Youth Town Council. At the February public meeting on school places, which was run jointly with the Parents group, over half the audience was probably aged under 40, a great improvement on previous meetings.

Communications

The new look 'Harpenden Society News' has received many compliments. Many thanks are due to Eric Midwinter for his masterful editorship and erudite writing and to Ron Taylor for taking over the design and layout with such skill and enthusiasm. We are also much indebted again to Barbara Ouston and her wonderful team of volunteers for the distribution of the 'News'. The web site is also much

improved, thanks to Nuri Wyeth, our new website manager. All committee members are now communicating by e-mail and e-mailing their reports before meetings. About one third of the membership have supplied e-mail addresses and have been written to by the Chairman once so far requesting support for our working groups. This produced at least five new volunteers.

The Society has also manned its stand at the Discovery Day, the Highland Games and on a September Saturday in the centre of Harpenden. We are much indebted to Chris Grey for storing, erecting and dismantling the stand as well as for arranging much of the display.

Publicity and Awards

Steve Gledhill has taken on the role of 'press officer' and recent articles in both the Advertiser and Review are testament to his good work. This is certainly raising the profile of the society. Also well reported were the two Society awards given in 2011, first to Batford's Porters Hill Play Area and secondly to Breathing Space in Thompsons Close. Our thanks to Rosemary Horne for convening the awards group and arranging two excellent presentation ceremonies.

The Society has held five Public Meetings during the Autumn and winter months. In September Eric Midwinter spoke on how a community determines its own social identity. In October Richard Thomas spoke on his work in the local prison. In December Oliver Randell gave an account of Harpenden's Nature Reserve, Batford Springs. The January and February meetings reflected the new objective to focus on issues affecting Harpenden by having panel presentations and discussion on the new planning environment and school places respectively.

Business Breakfast Club

The Chairman reported that he had given a talk to the Harpenden Business Breakfast Club, in preparation for which he had conducted a survey of 40 Harpenden businesses regarding how they contributed to the life of the town. 20 responses were received with encouraging accounts of recycling projects, apprenticeship and training schemes, participation in Harpenden in Bloom, links with schools, active community involvement and many examples of donations in cash and kind. The point of this exercise was to show that businesses makes a huge contribution to the well-being of our Town and its people, not only by providing the goods and services we want and the jobs that are needed to support that work, but also in many different ways beyond their immediate money-earning and job-creating activities. This deserves recognising and celebrating so that, hopefully, our businesses will be encouraged to contribute even more. A full report of this survey is available on the Society's website and the Society is exploring ways to follow up this initiative.

Neighbourhood Plan

A very constructive meetings was held with John Bagshaw, the Town Clerk, Michael Weaver, the Town Mayor and District and County Councillor, Theresa Heritage, that led to the Society beginning to build a 'wish list' of things we would like to see happen in the Town in both the near and more distant future.

Current ideas, in no particular order, include:

- The transformation of Thompsons Close as part of making the High Street much more fun as a place to shop.
- More retail-friendly parking arrangements.
- More pedestrian and pushchair friendly 'lower' High Street.
- Refurbishment of the Public Halls.
- The redevelopment of the Memorial Hospital (The Red House) as a 'wellness centre'.

- The creation of new housing, retail and business development in the Batford Industrial Estate.
- Redevelopment of the area behind the library for community use (e.g. as a cultural centre).
- Creation of a Harpenden Schools Forum.
- New, imaginative provision for teenager activities.
- Improved play facilities in Rothamsted Park and accompanying café and toilets.
- Better footpath lighting.
- Better litter clearance & more dog poo bins.

The Chairman stated that the Society would welcome additional ideas and said that once prioritised, the items on the Society's wish list should become formally recognised, so that as and when development opportunities arise, they receive full consideration. Next year the Society shall work on bringing at least some of the things on this 'wish list' to fruition as well as maintaining the core activities of the Working Groups.

Chairman's Closing Remarks

The Chairman reported that the changes described above could only have taken place with the help of all the committee members whom he thanked. He also thanked those committee members who had left the Society during the year: the Society's diligent secretary Peter Barrett, transport guru and vice chairman Malcolm Howe, computer expert Duncan Bullimore and minutes secretary Caroline Stanton.

The Chairman also gave particular thanks to two longstanding committee members who were standing down from the committee at the AGM: Rosemary Horne who has done so many jobs for the Society over the years that one loses count and Keith Nash, who has sat through more Town Council meetings, keeping an eye on what they are up to, than was probably good for him. Richard Thomas presented Rosemary and Keith with a small gift to thank them for their work with the Society.

The Chairman also thanked Richard Thomas for taking on the role of vice-chairman and giving him great support and inspiration during the last six months when the Society has been without a secretary. Thanks were also given to Arnold Allen, the Society's treasurer, who has not only continued to look after our finances with total assuredness but has also done much to bring the Society's systems up to date. Thanks were also given to Anthony Steele who is stepping down from his job as convenor of the Built Environment group. Fortunately he has agreed to serve on the committee for a further year.

The Chairman welcomed new members on the committee; the Society's new secretary Bob Fletcher, the Society's Public Order Working group convenor Alan Jackson, the Society's Built Environment group convenor Mike Waddilove, the Society's man about town, and editor of our sister journal Harpendia, Ron Taylor and our two representative of Harpenden's younger age group, Vicky Evans and Tim Riley.

The Chairman also thanked all of the Society's 1,000 plus members. He said that we may be disappointed that this number hasn't grown as much as we would have liked but it represents a higher percentage of our population than most other civic societies. The member's support gives the Society the strength to do things for the benefit Harpenden. The Chairman urged members to continue to support the Society and to get friends and neighbours to join as well.

6. Public Order Report

Alan Jackson reported on the activities of the Public Order group.

He said that the Society's activities in recent years reflect a strong concern among Members over public order issues; yet the reality is that Hertfordshire as a whole is one of the safest places in the country in which to live and Harpenden is a particularly safe town within the county. Furthermore, the position continues to improve as, according to official figures, recorded crimes in our area continue to fall. Most parts of the country would be hugely envious, but the low level of crime does not imply that there is reason for complacency. For the forces of law and order, big changes are afoot: the Hertfordshire Police Authority must save £40 million from their budget over the next three years, cooperation with Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Police will be increased, there will be more voluntary Special Constables working alongside Police Community Support Officers and on 15 November 2012 an elected Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner will replace the Hertfordshire Police Authority.

There can be no doubt that the Working Group needs to maintain close liaison with the Police and with Neighbourhood Watch: they will always be at the forefront of the fight against crime. There can also be little doubt that apprehending and punishing law-breakers are of limited value to enhancing security: crime prevention is what really matters. Much of the crime that concerns people on a day-to-day basis is youth crime. As well as being active in the traditional crime prevention areas, the Working Group will, over the coming year, try to identify how the Society can work with organisations that can help to prevent young people from engaging in crime and anti-social behaviour. Suggestions from Members are welcome.

The intention is that membership of the Group will include representatives of Neighbourhood Watch, the Fire and Rescue Service, youth organisations and possibly the Police themselves.

In addition to responding to events as they arise, the Working Group will:

- Enhance awareness of the Neighbourhood Watch scheme and the means by which it can be supported
- Enhance awareness of the most appropriate ways of contacting and supporting the local Police
- Help people to gain access to sources of information, including Police sources, on public order and safety issues in Harpenden (this would include safety in the home and exploitation of the elderly by rogue traders)
- Promote awareness of the Police Safer Neighbourhoods Scheme and the Harpenden Volunteer Police Cadets
- Advise on how to help prevent and mitigate the effects of anti-social behaviour
- Look into the possibility of attending the 'Priority Setting Meetings' of the local Police and, if so invited, putting in place a means of canvassing the views of Society Members on relevant issues
- Investigate whether it might be appropriate to work with the Hertfordshire Community Protection Directorate (this body was formed in 2011 to promote the safety, security and wellbeing of Hertfordshire residents; it includes Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Services, Trading Standards and the County's Community Safety Unit and Resilience Team)

7. Environment Issues

John Davis reported on the activities of the Environmental Issues group.

He said that the responsibility for Batford Springs has now been transferred from St Albans District Council to the Town Council and therefore local views will now be more strongly represented. John also reported that he continued to represent the Society on the St Albans District Council Environmental Forum which continued to be very active. One achievement of this council was the installation of double kerbing on the A1081 entering St Albans to prevent the previously unsightly verge parking.

He reported that the Society and the Town Council had both responded unfavourably to the proposal from Luton Borough Council to significantly increase Luton Airport's capacity. To confuse matters London Luton Airport Operations Ltd (LLAOL), the airport operators, also has now submitted an alternative proposal to increase the airport's capacity which John stated was not significantly different from the Council's proposal.

It was stated that the proposed increase in passenger capacity means that there will be 20,000 extra vehicles travelling into and out of the airport every day. Members were urged to make their comments on the Operator's plans. Post meeting note - how to comment can be found on the Operator's web site <http://www.london-luton.co.uk/en/content/8/1171/masterplan.html>

8. Health & Social Welfare

Eric Midwinter reported that the Harpenden Memorial Hospital issue continues to hold the group's main attention. A courteous response has now been received from the District Council in regards of the Society's 'Red House' briefing paper which proposed that a Wellness Centre should be included as part of the re-development. Follow-up meetings are being planned to further raise the profile of this issue

9. Education & Leisure

Richard Thomas reported that a group of twelve people had been formed to examine what leisure facilities the town is offering and what it should be offering for a wide range of ages from young to old.

Eric Midwinter had met with Herts County Council library service to discuss their offerings and future plans.

Ron Taylor has attended meetings of the Public Hall Users group and Rothamsted Park user group. Suggestions to improve the park playground facilities (see the Society's Wish List), will be made to this latter user group.

The February public meeting on school places, which was run jointly with the Parents Group, confirmed that there was a deficit in both secondary and primary school places in Harpenden. Follow up meetings with various stakeholders are being planned to progress this issue.

10. Built Environment

Anthony Steele reported on the activities of the Built Environment group.

The group has continued to monitor planning applications, with a team of eight people scrutinising submitted plans each week. There have not been many plans to which the Society has objected. Recent ones include a proposed champagne bar in the High Street on the grounds that there are too many eateries and loss of conventional shopping, another in Pennycroft where there is a proposal to replace an existing house with a very large development which the Society believes is out of scale with the neighbours.

Issues have been the car dealer site at the corner of Townsend Lane and Luton Road, this is now to reopen as a car dealership, and the Glen Eagle Manor Hotel. The Society were invited by the owners to see the hotel building. They wanted to show us that there were problems in converting the existing

structure into flats. No plans have yet been submitted, but it was suggested that new flats could be built with similar scale and height as the existing building but with underground garaging. This would enable some of the space allocated to the existing car park to be landscaped, as surface parking would only be needed for deliveries and visitors. We await proposals with interest.

The other main issue has been the change in the planning system that is in the process of being introduced. We had a successful meeting here in January, when Town Councillor David Williams ably outlined what is happening, and the opportunity presented by the Neighbourhood Plan policy. Soon individuals will be able to be involved in the process. The new 50 page National Planning Policy document has now been published. So far it has been well received, but the detail is important, we need therefore to see how it works out in practice. We live in interesting times!

Anthony reported that he had been involved with the group for about 9 years and so he had decided to pass the responsibility to new hands. He reported that Michael Waddilove has agreed to take on the role. Michael has been a District Councillor and a member of Plans North committee and so many members may know of him. Michael clearly knows the area well, and understands the problems the Society faces and therefore Anthony said that he was confident that the group will be in experienced hands. Anthony said that he would take the opportunity to thank the group members for the support and encouragement given to him, and to wish his successors well for the future.

11. Green Belt Association

Richard Thomas reported on the activities of the Green Belt association

He reported that the Government's previous top down housing targets, which we opposed, have been erased with the abolition of the old Regional Spatial Strategy. This was one of the first acts of the Coalition. The new National Planning Policy Framework, which was published yesterday, will be receiving our attention. It has pleased the pressure groups that had been lobbying against the previous draft - the National Trust, the Campaign to Protect Rural England, the London Green Belt Council and the Daily Telegraph - who are all supportive of the new version. So that looks promising.

Finally, Richard reported that there seems no prospect of Hertfordshire's infrastructure deficit being resolved, and that this will be a limiting factor for new housing in our district even if land is available. Water, schools, medical facilities, roads and parking etc. are vital. Estimates of the size of the present deficit range from £3.5 billion to £5 billion. No-one knows where that kind of money can be found.

12. Transport

The Chairman reported that Donald Robinson is working on this issue for the Society, A draft response to Hertfordshire's Rural Transport Strategy is being produced.

13. Economic Activity

Chris Grey reported that he had just attended a meeting with the Town Council and the District Council to discuss the re-development of the Lea Valley Industrial Estate. He reported that many of the occupants want to stay on the site but in upgraded premises. The plan is that the site will be redeveloped with retail, trade, business and housing areas. Some form of land exchange may also be included.

14. Society Awards

Rosemary Horne reported that the Society had awarded a Certificate of Merit to M&Co. for repairing and bringing into operation the clock on the front of their premises in the High St., a Certificate of Merit to Bricrest Homes for their clock in Southdown and a Letter of Commendation to Patrick Fisher for the wattle fence on the edge of Greenway Spinney.

15. Election of Officers

The Chairman referred to the nominations for the Officers and Committee members listed in his report, copies of which had been provided throughout the hall, and stated that nominees were all willing to stand as stated. The election of the Officers and Committee members was approved by the meeting.

Officers

President	Vacant		
Vice presidents	Keith Jennings, John Hunt		
Chairman	Chris Marsden	Vice Chairman	Richard Thomas
Secretary	Bob Fletcher	Treasurer	Arnold Allen

Committee members

Penny Ayres, Michael Waddilove, John Davis, Chris Grey, Eric Midwinter, Keith Nash, Barbara Ouston, Anthony Steele, Vicky Evans, Alan Jackson, Steve Gledhill, Tim Riley, Ron Taylor

Ex Officio (not for election) Oliver Randell

16. Any Other Business

Responding to a question from the floor the Chairman emphasised that the Society is careful not to duplicate the work of other organisations, rather the intention is to complement the work of such organisations as the Town Council etc.

17. Forthcoming events

The Society will have a stand at the town's Jubilee event being held on 2nd June 2012

This year's Society summer event for members will be a picnic at Batford Springs at 6.00pm on the 28th June 2012.

The first of the Society's public meeting for the next session will be on the 27th September 2012. This meeting will likely be an extra ordinary AGM to discuss proposed revisions to the Society's constitution.

18. Dates of the next AGM

Thursday 28th March 2013 at 8.00pm at Park hall, Leyton Road, Harpenden.

19. The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 9.30 p.m.