

Theatre hub 'will be ready a year earlier'

Thanks to an accelerated development schedule, the theatre and cultural hub in the new Harpenden Leisure Centre complex is due to open in January 2021 – a year earlier than previously envisaged, that is at the same time as the adjacent new sports centre. St Albans District Council's 'Commercial and Development' portfolio holder Julian Daly, addressing the Harpenden Society's April public meeting, said the programme had been revised for several reasons, not least enabling the existing Public Halls to be closed sooner for revenue-generating redevelopment (as detailed in our Winter newsletter).

However, the consequent need to start converting the present sports centre into the new cultural hub before the new expanded sports centre adjoining the swimming pool is completed will mean, said Cllr Daly, some inevitable disruption for sports centre users. But a temporary gymnasium building is due to be erected on ground to the west of the new sports centre – where a new 92-space leisure centre car park will be subsequently located.

Such a temporary (though purpose designed) gym building, housing keep-fit facilities especially, will nevertheless require planning permission, which could mean a delay to the programme, though it has been pointed out that, with SADC as both the applicant and the planning authority, any legislative obstacle should be readily surmountable.

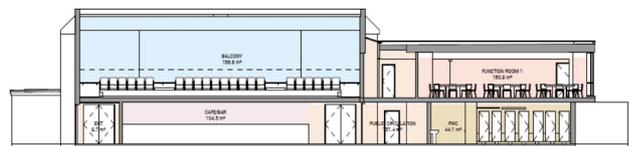
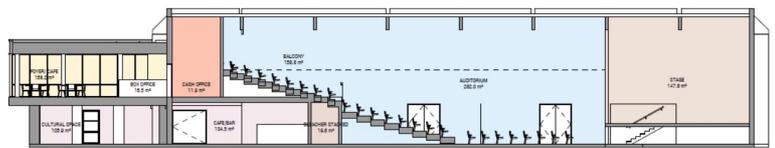
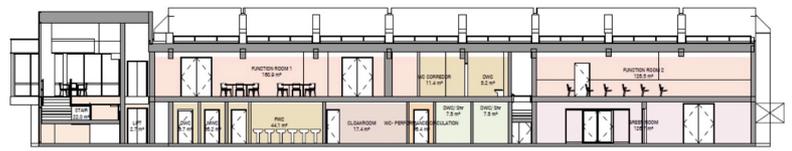


Julian Daly: 'Valuable project experience from Westminster Lodge'. Annie Brewster: 'Sports centre more remunerative than arts and culture hub'.

Regrettably, not all current sports centre activities will be catered for in the temporary gym. Badminton players for example will, during the expected interim period from March 2020 to the following January, be deprived of Harpenden facilities. But SADC councillor Annie Brewster, 'Sports and Culture' portfolio holder, told badminton enthusiasts at the April meeting that courts at two other council-run sports centre, at Westminster Lodge and Cotlandswick (London Colney) would be available to them at no extra cost. One or two in the audience nevertheless expressed mild outrage at the prospect of having to travel to the other side of St Albans to pursue their chosen sport.

Swimmers will be similarly unhappy with the planned closure of the main pool for refurbishment from May 2020 until the January 2021 opening of the whole leisure complex. They will have the option of remaining dry or, like the badminton players, traveling to St. Albans

Cllr Daly emphasised that the cost of what amounted to two new leisure facilities was a critical issue. The council was working to its already-declared budget of £18.8 million, towards which £5.5 million would come



from the Public Halls redevelopment. He added that although the sports centre and the cultural hub were being developed as part of one ambitious programme, it was acknowledged that, as far as ongoing costs are concerned, the former had effectively to subsidise the latter. Sports centre membership was the prime money spinner, though it was hoped the upgraded theatre facility and three adjacent large meeting rooms would, compared with the present large Public Hall, attract new and bigger events, generating more income.

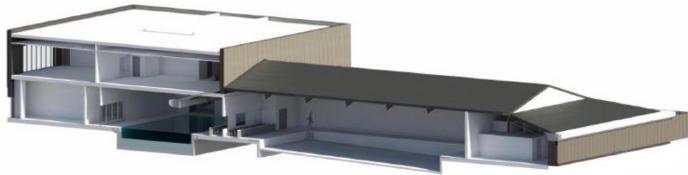
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Cllr Brewster pointed out that the design of the new 500-seat 'Eric Morecambe' theatre, with its banked seating, draws on ideas and experience from St Albans' Abbey Theatre, and will feature such peripheral but important attractions as a crush bar and box office café. Nearby will be Harpenden's own museum, long awaited by the town's local history society, with display areas designed to attract visitors to other parts of the building as well as those specifically interested in Harpenden's heritage.

Will residents in the new Park House apartments, close to the present sports centre, be disturbed by the noise of the building work during its conversion to the cultural hub? That was one of the questions asked at the April meeting. Cllr Daly asserted that building regulations would ensure minimum disturbance.

Another question from the floor related to the new leisure centre's car parking requirement, to which Cllr Daly replied that an additional 92 parking spaces would be added, augmenting the existing capacity of the Amenbury Lane car park. He pointed out however that Hertfordshire County Council levied a £500 tax per car park space: £46,000 per annum for 92 spaces. A suggestion that today's Amenbury Lane car park could be double-decked had been rejected, he said, because, as well as being inordinately costly, the area was designated Green Belt and such a project would therefore be untenable.

For a direct link to the meeting presentation slides go to: www.harpendensociety.org/



Elevation views of the new Sports centre and pool areas



Welcome to Hester

We welcome Hester Gabbutt as the Society's new Membership Secretary. She takes over the place on the committee occupied for the last three years by Jan Smith, whose many other commitments have compelled her reluctantly to relinquish the role. Handing over the reins is, says Jan, an opportunity to remind members to ensure their subscription payments, whether by standing order or by cheque are up to date.

Hester is a relative newcomer to Harpenden, she and her husband having moved here in 2014. But after living in St Albans for almost 30 years she knows the area well and is keen to help the Society in its endeavours to retain our town's unique character, notably its green spaces, necessarily supporting our efforts to prevent overdevelopment.

A solicitor by profession, Hester has, since retirement, become involved with several local charities and interest groups. Those have included a period as company secretary and trustee of Grove House (Rennie Grove), and membership of Harpenden Local History Society, St Albans Civic Society, Harpenden WEA, St Albans U3A and St Albans Organ Theatre.



Hester Gabbutt

TRIBUTE

Ian Fulton

Former chairman and later president of the Harpenden Society, Ian Fulton, who died on February 22 at the age of 84, will be fondly remembered by those many people in and around Harpenden who knew him. His involvement in the life of the town over many decades won him the respect and affection of those in numerous organisations.

Ian and his sister Jill were born in the Winchmore Hill area of London, but came to Harpenden as children during the Second World War, where Ian attended Moreton End School, later attending Westminster School in London. After National Service in the army and Balliol College, Oxford, he took up his profession as a lawyer, in due course joining the Taylor Walker (later Taylor Walton) practice in Harpenden.

He was the last chairman of Harpenden Urban District Council, from 1972-74, before its abolition and the establishment of St Albans City & District Council. He then served as Mayor of St Albans from 1974-5.



Philanthropy was always a shining feature of Ian's character, to the extent that in his mid-forties, clearly after profound heart searching, he renounced his legal career in order to pursue an obviously less financially rewarding but more altruistic calling. He duly trained and qualified as a psychiatric nurse, where his duties included work at Harpenden Memorial Hospital.

His involvement in local organisations continued to flourish. His chairmanship and presidency of the Harpenden Society extended for twenty years from 1992 – when he took over from Colin Curl – to 2012, when progressively more serious health problems forced him to relinquish his leading role with the Society, while of course maintaining his membership.

Meanwhile he was also chairman of Harpenden & Wheathampstead Scout District Committee from 1977 to 2014, serving nine successive District Commissioners and earning a Medal of Merit in 2003. In their own tribute, the committee say 'Ian's overarching skill was in motivating achievement and high standards'.

Ian contributed immensely to the wider community. He was a founder member of Friends of St Nicholas Church – where his funeral was held on March 22. His other notable roles included: president of Harpenden Rovers Youth Football; area vice-president of St John's Ambulance; patron of Harpenden Choral Society; Trustee of St Albans International Organ Festival; chairman of the League of Friends, Harpenden Memorial Hospital; one-time governor of the National Childrens Home.

For the last 45 years or so Ian lived with his late wife Patricia and then with his sister Jill at Welcombe Cottage facing on to the Common, next to the Quaker Meeting House, where in his front garden he would good-naturedly host informal refreshments at such events as the Harpenden Carnival and the annual Classic Cars show on the Common nearby.

Library calls for more Wednesday volunteers

In our Winter newsletter we celebrated Harpenden Library volunteers' five years of dedicated service in keeping the library open on Wednesday afternoons. The team is now looking for one or two more volunteers. An interest in libraries and in assisting library users is desirable and some basic computer skill is essential, though full training is given. Each volunteer is usually asked to work on one Wednesday a month. Anyone interested should contact the library at library@harpendensociety.org



Outcry over Common tree felling

Widespread dismay has been expressed by members of Harpenden Common Golf Club, and by others who spend their leisure time on the common, after learning of the Town Council's little-publicised but draconian plans to fell over 100 trees on the common, especially around the area of the golf course. They include nearly 60 oaks, many of them mature trees.

Hornbeams, birches and hawthorns as well as oaks are destined for removal. Seemingly as a sop to protesters, the council says over 30 of the felled trees 'will be recycled as biomass' to produce sustainable fuel. Town Clerk Carl Cheevers has said the focus is on improving the common's acidic grassland and meadow areas. Deemed to be a scarce and important habitat, they are said to be 'gradually succumbing to scrub and woodland encroachment and shading'.

'Our aim', says Mr Cheevers, 'is to conserve, enhance and increase areas of species-rich meadow and acidic grassland', adding that, because Harpenden Common is in a designated conservation area, approval for the tree felling has had to be obtained from St Albans District Council's trees and woodlands department.



County Council stiffens its airport expansion objections

Objections to Luton Airport's planned further expansion, to cater for up to 32 million passengers per annum, have been expressed vociferously, by protest groups such as LADACAN, as well of course as by the Harpenden Society. The prospect of greatly increased aircraft noise disturbance has been the focus of local 'anti airport' sentiment. But associated expectations of ever worsening traffic congestion on roads leading to and from the airport, especially the narrow Lower Luton Road through Harpenden, have increased anxieties further.

It is therefore good to know that Hertfordshire County Council has taken a firmer stance on the airport expansion issue. It claims to have 'identified ensuring sustainable transport links (within the county) to and from the airport as a key challenge'.

Derrick Ashley, HCC cabinet member for growth, infrastructure planning and economy, says 'we continue to have serious concerns about the impact of aircraft noise on nearby towns and villages', as well as 'how an extra 14 million passengers a year will

get to the airport without causing serious problems on Hertfordshire roads'.

He points out that with up to 100,000 new homes due to be built in the county over the next 15 years, 'we are already expecting a 20% increase in traffic on our roads if we don't take action. We need to make sure the airport has proper sustainable transport plans that encourage people to travel to and from the airport by bus or rail'.

Luton Borough councillor Andy Malcolm, the chairman of London Luton Airport Ltd, responding to HCC's concerns, says 'our technical advisors are already working closely with a wide range of stakeholders, including HCC, to make sure that our evolving strategies to minimise and mitigate impacts will be the best they can be'.



EasyJet's new supposedly quieter Airbus A320neo plane climbs away from Luton airport

Hopper restarted

Some six months after the original Harpenden Hopper hail-and-ride community bus service was suspended, following repeated mechanical problems with its two rather ancient Mercedes vehicles, the service was restarted with a metaphorical fanfare of trumpets on April 2.

Each of the two brand new 17-seaters is based on a Peugeot Boxer van converted to bus specification, complete with rear wheelchair tail-lift, by GM Coachwork of Newton Abbot, Devon. The two vehicles are understood to represent a Town Council investment of just under £60,000. In return they promise greater comfort for passengers as well, of course, as improved reliability.

Under Town Council sponsorship, they run from Tuesdays to Thursdays only. One serves the north of the town, approximately replicating the route of its predecessor, that is connecting Church Green in the town centre with Derwent Road at Kinsbourne Green, via Park Hill, Park Rise, Roundwood Lane (Homedell/Bethesda), Tuffnells Way and Tintern Close, providing two services in each direction, each morning and afternoon.

In order to reduce unduly lengthy journey times – a previous disincentive to some would-be users of the service – the revised Kinsbourne Green route omits the former loops past Wood End School and through Aplins Close, and via Red House/Carlton Road/Devonshire Road/Victoria Road/Bowers Way.

In response to calls for an extension of the Hopper service, two additional routes have been added. One links the Southdown area to central Harpenden, on a ‘circular’ route from Church Green via The George, West Common Way, Limbrick Road, Eastmoor Park, Cravells Road, The Plough & Harrow and Southdown Road.

A somewhat shorter, ‘figure-of-eight’ route, dubbed the ‘Town Loop’, takes passengers from Church Green, via Bowers Way, Carlton Road, Devonshire Road, Station Road, The George, The Old Cock, Townsend Lane, Alders End Lane, Moreton End Lane, back to Church Green. The two new routes provide two services each morning and afternoon using the same bus.

The reinvigorated Hopper service clearly deserves to be better patronised than its single-route predecessor, whose buses were frequently observed to have only the driver aboard. Andy Buchanan, a key member of the Hopper management team, is optimistic that the new vehicles, serving more strategically-planned routes will gradually attract more passengers. He points out that as the town’s parking problems become more acute, it will not be just the elderly and those without cars who stand to benefit from the Hopper service.



The new Hopper minibuses are based at YWAM's Ambrose Lane campus

Red House delay hit with new uncertainty

Lack of progress on redevelopment of the Red House site in Carlton Road, to create Harpenden’s much-needed new Health and Wellbeing Centre, looks certain to be further exacerbated by a major reorganisation of local NHS provision announced at the end of January. Provision of the adult community services contract in the West Herts area will be handed over in October from Hertfordshire Community Trust (HCT) to a much larger, and arguably more faceless, body, Central London Community Healthcare Trust (CLCH).

The change is being made following what is described as a ‘market testing process’ undertaken by Herts Valley Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), whose ongoing prevarication on the Red House plans was outlined in our Winter newsletter. HCT’s chief executive Clare Hawkins has expressed great disappointment at the decision, but says the trust will not be raising a legal challenge, if only to avoid further public expenditure.

Meanwhile county councillor Teresa Heritage has said she will be taking up the question of the Red House project with the CCG, expressing the view that the Health and Wellbeing Centre is likely to be needed despite the NHS contract change.



Artist's impression of the proposed new Health and Wellbeing Centre

Did You Know? From Harpenden's history Flowton Priory – a 16th Century 'transplant'

Many people in Harpenden must be unaware of what is arguably the town's largest private residence, set in 3 acres of manicured gardens, yet little more than half a mile from the High Street. Flowton Priory is an imposing and Grade II listed timber-framed Tudor-style manor house reckoned to date from the early 16th Century.

But it has occupied its present site at West Common only since about 1928. How can that be, you might ask. The answer is that, most unusually, it was moved bodily, brick by brick and timber by timber, from the village of Flowton in Suffolk, some six miles north of Ipswich, and from which it takes its name.

There is no record of an actual priory at Flowton, but in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries, during the Romantic phase of the Gothic Revival, there was a fashion for naming houses after priories and abbeys, and it was probably at this time that the house came to be called 'Flowton Priory'.

Drawings at the Suffolk Record Office indicate how the building came to be moved to Harpenden. The earliest drawing is dated November 1923, which is probably when it was dismantled. It is described as 'Proposed Half-Timbered House at Totteridge, Hertfordshire, for W J Pavyer Esq', from which it would appear that the original intention was to re-erect it in Totteridge.

Mr Pavyer was evidently a member of the St Albans and Hertfordshire Architectural and Archaeological Society, listed in 1912 as living at 'Linford, York Road, St Albans', whose other interests included historic pottery and coins. He employed the services of John Albert Sherman (1876-1966), an Ipswich architect said to be particularly associated with Suffolk timber-framed buildings, whether restoring old ones, designing new ones in the style of old ones, or – as in the case of Flowton Priory – re-erecting old ones in other places. Records show the re-erection was undertaken by 'J Dennis', a St Albans contractor.

In 1999 the house was badly damaged by fire, when some of its stained-glass windows, some of them pre-dating the building itself, were lost. Subsequent restoration included the incorporation of numerous 21st Century 'mod cons' internally, including three 'luxurious' bathrooms to accompany the five spacious bedrooms. Flowton Priory has changed hands several times in the 21st Century. It was on the market for £7.5 million in 2013 but the price was reported to have been reduced to attract an eventual buyer. In 2017 it was offered by estate agent John Curtis for £5.95 million.

Acknowledgement: the website of Harpenden Local History Society



EDITOR'S VIEW

Alan Bunting

The Best Laid Plans....?

News that the St Albans Local Plan has been cleared by the District Council for government approval will be welcomed as a step forward in what has been a tortuous process, almost as agonising, some might say, as the Brexit machinations at national level. But a further hurdle has yet to be overcome. The Secretary of State has to appoint an examiner to decide, after a public hearing, whether the LP is 'sound'. It was a perceived lack of such 'soundness' which rendered the earlier draft unacceptable.

It looks probable that, either before or at that public hearing, appeals or objections will be raised. A likely appellant/objector is the Lawes Trust, parent organisation of Rothamsted Research, whose plan to build around 1000 homes on its land north of Redbourn is not included, or even mentioned, in the newly-approved LP, despite its potential for contributing significantly to the 'quota' of new homes being statutorily demanded in the district.

It has to be hoped that the aforementioned examiner will make sure that implementation of an approved LP takes into account the influence of Harpenden's own 'referendum authenticated' Neighbourhood Plan, when vital planning decisions are made in the future.

Many Harpenden residents remain unhappy however about the limited scope of both plans, inasmuch that they seek to impose controls only on those developers wanting to embark on major projects, requiring them especially to contribute financially to related infrastructure costs, including schools, medical facilities and so on, as well as nearby road improvements.

Though those supporting infrastructure cost requirements are commendable, a matching 'cast iron' commitment should be made by the planning authority as an integral factor in its conditions of approval. It should form a legal obligation, ensuring that the resulting funds 'extracted' from developers are not only used for the intended purpose, but that provision of the infrastructure facilities meets detailed specifications and, of equal importance, lays down a strict timetable.



There should be a built-in safeguard preventing a new estate of say 500 houses being built, sold and occupied, before work begins on the promised schools, social facilities, access roads



(nowadays to include cycle paths) needed to cater for the big increase in local population. The desperate need for additional school places in the catchment area around Harpenden, highlighted by the year's delay in finishing the Katherine Warington School at Batford, is surely confirmation that any new major housing development can only be sanctioned 'in tandem with' supporting infrastructure.

There are other issues which people care more about than those covered in either the LP or the NP and which arguably highlight planning system loopholes. For example, what about the scenario of the next-door neighbour who wants to knock down his three-bedroom house and replace it with one having six bedrooms and that is not only much bigger, typically with a cinema room in its newly-excavated basement, but which is, more importantly, totally out of harmony, both architecturally and appearance-wise, with the mature houses on either side?

Such applications all too often appear to be just nodded through by SADC's planners, often to the exasperation of neighbours who have mounted a multi-signature petition. The provisions of the latest LP draft and of the Harpenden NP fail to address those kind of legitimate concerns, leading not only to streetscape eyesores, but to neighbourly antagonisms.

Evidence that the Harpenden Neighbourhood Plan – albeit now 'referendum confirmed' – has limited 'teeth' in the context of a one- or two-house rebuild project emerged in the last month or two when it was invoked by a neighbour objecting to a proposed new house nearby but seemingly to little or no effect.

Lodging an objection to a proposed one- or two-house development application ought in itself to be a straightforward procedure. The detailed plans and specification of a proposed new house should be readily available to any interested party on the planning authority's website.

However, shockingly, St Albans District Council has, FOR MANY MONTHS, suffered 'disruption to our online planning service'. In order to view the plans of a nearby development in Harpenden, one must currently make an appointment with the planning department at the Civic Centre and then travel to St Albans. The website informs enquirers that 'we are continuing to work on upgrading our on-line planning service'.

The result is that residents who could – but might not necessarily – be affected by a proposed nearby housing development, could well be deterred from pursuing the matter because of the online planning service disruption hassle. It unquestionably amounts to a little bit of local democracy erosion. **We are surely entitled to ask, rhetorically, 'how the hell can SADC's computer system managers allow the online planning service to be out of action for so long?'**

Society Awards

For the second year in succession, none of the nominations received was considered worthy of the Society's prestigious Plaque. But, after prolonged and vigorous debate, centred particularly around the building's height and its controversially white-painted brickwork, a Certificate of Merit for the 2018 year has been awarded to Pegasus's Park House apartment development adjoining Rothamsted Park. The development comprises 38 one- and two-bedroom flats which, points out the Awards committee, is helping to meet the substantial need for additional residential accommodation, especially for the over 60s.



Pavilioned in splendour

Harpenden Cricket Club is looking forward to the completion and occupation of what promises to be a splendid new pavilion at its familiar ground on Harpenden Common. Construction work began in mid-February with the aim of its becoming into full use by the beginning of the league cricket season.

Its total floor area of 2,800sq ft makes it 20% larger than the 45-year-old pavilion it replaces, making provision for improved changing rooms and lounge, as well as better facilities for those watching matches. Club president Geoff

Newman says the new clubhouse will ensure the future of cricket on the Common for many years to come.

Crucially the new pavilion will be available for community use, typically for social functions, outside the cricket season. That helped ensure the project's planning approval, as well as accompanying support from Harpenden Town Council, along with grants from Harpenden Building Society and Harpenden Trust.

Harpenden Cricket Club is the largest club in Hertfordshire. It has more than 600 members and runs six Saturday sides and 17 colts teams for youngsters, including five girls' sides. Ahead of the 2018 season the club acquired new practice nets which, in company with the new pavilion, are part of a long-term refurbishment programme.



SOCIETY PUBLIC MEETING DATES

Autumn details to be announced

Future dates and speakers are yet to be confirmed, check our web site for details www.harpendensociety.org

Please send comments on articles or any other issues raised in this edition to the editor: Alan Bunting editor@harpendensociety.org.

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Visit the Society's website –

www.harpendensociety.org

Designed by Ron Taylor

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