



'A HEALTHY OUTLOOK'

Guest speaker at the Harpenden Society's April meeting (following the AGM) was Simon Linnett, chairman since 2014 of Luton & Dunstable University Hospital Trust. He spoke about the future of NHS provision in the area served by the hospital, which includes Harpenden and surrounding Hertfordshire villages. He pointed out that 10% of L&D's income from the NHS was in respect of its service to the population of that Hertfordshire 'enclave'.

By way of introduction he explained that the word 'university' in the hospital's title, derived from its vital courses of consultant training. It underlined the quality of the service provided by 4000 members of staff for a population of some 330,000 in the Luton and Dunstable area of Bedfordshire, as well as Harpenden and surrounding villages across the border in Hertfordshire.

With due modesty Mr Linnett said he reckoned the L&D was 'reasonably successful' compared with many other NHS hospitals across the country, a number of which had suffered negative publicity in recent times. The yardstick often applied in judging a hospital's performance was the time patients coming into the Accident and Emergency department had to wait for attention. Over 90% of those arriving at the L&D's A&E department were seen within four hours.



Like other hospitals the L&D was waiting for a further injection of NHS funding pledged by the government. But he feared the imminent General Election could well interfere with the timetable.

That money would make more beds available. As things stood, there was typically a shortfall of some 80 beds; in other words that number of beds were occupied by patients who had been medically discharged but had no post-discharge care in place, either at home or through social care facilities.

Mr Linnett conceded that some of L&D's secondary care facilities were 'tired' and even 'decrepit', while nevertheless well run. But the existing site had a negative effect on patient, visitor and staff wellbeing.

However, a more modern hospital was evolving. He referred to the five-year £150 million site redevelopment plan approved in 2014 which would include a new five-storey acute services block, a major expansion of the existing A&E department and a suite of additional operating theatres (able to perform some 1500 types of operation), as well as an integrated critical care floor with isolation rooms. Away from



Above: Simon Linnett.

the project's vital clinical objectives, many would also welcome the inclusion of plans for improved car parking for patients, staff and, not least, visitors.

Mr Linnett said that, as in the world of private business, where he had worked earlier in his career, a hospital had to be run as cost effectively as possible. But a key difference was that the commercial law of supply and demand could not be readily applied. Sudden demand for medical services was not predictable. He cited the instance of a TV documentary on breast cancer which had triggered a surge in the requirement for breast screening services.

Nevertheless, L&D had in recent years remained profitable, in contrast to Milton Keynes and Bedford trust hospitals, with which it was now grouped in one of 44 areas as parts of an NHS England reorganisation, and which continued to be loss making.

There was a recognition, said Mr Linnett, that the pressure on hospitals had to be addressed in ways other than on-site expansion. Accordingly, L&D had set itself a number of objectives which, crucially, included establishing a more integrated relationship with GPs and social care services in its catchment area.

He also alluded to the broader issue of encouraging would-be hospital patients to lead healthier lifestyles, where facilities like the 'Health and Wellbeing Campus' planned for the Red House site in Harpenden would play a vital role. As an aside he suggested that those covered by private health insurance tended to stay more healthy, if only to keep down their premiums.

He reminded his audience that private health services had both good and bad aspects. Obviously they allowed those who could afford it often to receive faster, though not necessarily better, treatment. But, importantly they took pressure off the invariably stretched NHS.

Patients from Harpenden attending L&D were, he said (to some laughter), 'good patients'. They invariably turned up for their appointments, unlike some from elsewhere on the hospital's 'patch'. Perhaps, suggested Mr Linnett, a nominal charge (possibly refundable) should be made for routine hospital or GP appointments.

SOCIETY AWARDS 2016

At The Harpenden Society's April meeting in Park Hall, held in conjunction with its 2017 AGM, the Society's Awards for projects which have enhanced the local area of Harpenden and are of architectural merit or of historic or other public interest or which contribute visually or socially to the locality in 2016 – for which nine nominations had been received – were announced and presented.

The prestigious Harpenden Society Plaque for 2016 was awarded to Stonehurst Court, (right) the apartment block at Southdown, immediately adjacent to the Harpenden Trust Centre, on the site of the former (long derelict) Rose & Crown pub. Penny Ayres, chair of the Society Awards committee said the new apartment block improved the appearance of the Southdown area and was architecturally interesting with its corner 'turret' feature, imaginative brickwork and differing roof levels adding to its appeal. It also provided much-needed housing more affordable than many other properties in the town.



Above: Against the backdrop of Stonehurst Court, chairman Phil Waters presents the Harpenden Society's 2016 Plaque to Shanly Homes' construction director Derek Lawler with Martin Brown, sales manager.

Letters of Commendation were awarded to: **Harpenden Town Council** for its outstanding **Christmas Lights** decorating the main shopping areas of the town, which by common consent, created a more striking display than in any previous year. (Below: Town mayor Nicola Linacre receives the HTC award from Penny Ayres)



The Oddfellows Arms pub in Amenbury Lane for its impressive refurbishment and garden layout. Landlady Nicky Hackett was present to receive the Award.



The Royal British Legion for the attractive extension and refurbishment of its historic home 'Bennets' in Leyton Road (whose history is related in the Spring issue of The Harpenden Society newsletter).





Above: Outgoing chairman Chris Marsden (left) welcomes his successor Phil Waters.

‘Anywhere’ to ‘somewhere’: The Harpenden Society challenge

Following the Harpenden Society’s 2017 AGM, retiring chairman Chris Marsden, in his valedictory message to members, said his close involvement with the society over six years had transformed him from an ‘anywhere’ to a ‘somewhere’ person.

Many working people could, he said, live almost anywhere and they often frequently moved to a new area without getting involved in local affairs. As a schoolteacher and later as a London commuter, Chris said he saw his home in Harpenden mainly as the place where he slept and spent most weekends.

That remained the case until he retired from full-time work. Then gradually he became more of a ‘somewhere’ person, something which was ‘reinforced in spades’ when he was asked to become chairman of the Harpenden Society. There, in a six-year stint, he had learned a lot about the local community and he said he was proud of what the society had achieved in that time.

However there was still much to do. Although the society relied on a subscribing membership for both its revenue and its credibility as a voice of Harpenden, its job was to serve the interests of all the town’s people. In return for their subscriptions, members did not expect direct services in return. Most were strong ‘somewhere’ people who cared passionately about the quality of that ‘somewhere’.

He said the challenge for the Harpenden Society was to encourage those ‘anywhere’ people to value their ‘somewhere’ – to feel they belonged to the community and shared an interest in the town’s future development. One approach was through furthering the society’s relationship with the many local clubs and societies, which the ‘anywhere’ people often valued, if only temporarily.

Without Whom – Chris Marsden

By Eric Midwinter

In 2011 the Harpenden Society was at a low ebb. ‘I thought the society might have to close down’, was the gloomy view of then president Ian Fulton. But, fortunately, as the proverb has it, ‘cometh the hour, come the man.’ Or, more accurately, the chairman, in the energetic shape of Chris Marsden, who, for six bustling years, has refreshed the society and re-established it as a voice of civil concern and purpose.

Two strands stand out among several in the successful skein of his impressive chairmanship. He encouraged the organisation of the society’s operations on a thematic basis, under seven defined headings, covering every aspect of town life, each under the watch of a working group.

The Harpenden Society was thus armed as a friendly watchdog ‘for all seasons’, transformed from an amenity group, with a rather limited agenda, chiefly concerned with the built environment, to an all-embracing civic body.

Chris animated the society, shifting its stance from passive to active, from deliberative to pragmatic. He has arguably echoed, in his role as chairman, the urgent locution of another who took up rather more fateful reins when times were dark, Winston Churchill: exhorting ‘Action This Day!’.

Accordingly, he never allows a meeting to be concluded without ensuring that several people, himself included, has a task to undertake. He would count it as a wasteful and irritating failure to bring a discussion to an end without something happening. As Churchill pronounced, ‘I like things to happen and if they don’t happen I like to make them happen’.

Chris leaves the society immeasurably more aligned, in construct and style, to the modern needs of Harpenden, with every opportunity to play a vital role in the town’s further story. Chris Marsden; ‘without whom’ this would not have been possible.

Framing our future neighbourhood

Harpenden's Neighbourhood Plan came under the spotlight at the Harpenden Society's March public meeting. Town Clerk Carl Cheevers (below) said the NP gave residents the opportunity to 'get involved', by completing the questionnaire circulated by the Town Council to 13,500 households in the town and attending one of the associated drop-in sessions.



He explained that the concept of the NP had grown out of the government's 2011 Localism Act, designed to give people a greater 'say' in the way their immediate environment developed over the next 15 years: where homes, shops and offices should be built, as well as the appearance of new developments and related infrastructure.

It was important to realise however that although it was not mandatory – under Localism legislation – for Harpenden to formulate a Neighbourhood Plan, it was, in Carl's words, 'too good an opportunity to miss'. He cautioned however that the NP had to 'align' with St Albans District Council's Strategic Local Plan.

Nevertheless the NP focus should, he said, be on 'what we can do' rather than on what 'we cannot do'. On that basis, the Town Council was moving ahead, commissioning a group of eleven consultants charged, in a seven-stage approach, with defining the NP's 'vision and objectives' by a January 18 2018 target date.

Their key role would be to 'test the options' submitted through the NP questionnaire (to which there had been some 1500 responses at the end of March) and at a series of public drop-in sessions, leading to a residents' referendum mid-way through next year.

The NP deliberations would, said Carl, be undertaken by working groups under specified headings: housing; transport and movement; employment and retail; social infrastructure (including schools) and community facilities; and environmental sustainability and design.

The Town Clerk concluded his presentation by urging members of the Harpenden Society to encourage their friends and neighbours in the town 'to have their say' in helping to shape the way the town will develop in the coming years.

Opening what proved to be a lively question and answer session following Carl Cheevers' presentation, town and

county councillor David Williams suggested the NP could call for a new primary school in the town to accompany the numerous new housing developments under way or in the pipeline. Cllr Williams, in a separate observation, pointed out that SADC's SLP – which inevitably influenced NP aspirations – was currently on hold, though it was hoped its status would be clearer by June.

Other views from the body of the hall included an observation – which was not disputed – that the NP could have no influence on the threat of housing development on Harpenden's north-eastern doorstep which could be sanctioned by Central Bedfordshire District Council.

As to the position of the NP within the 'umbrella' of the STP, raised by another resident at the meeting, the Town Clerk maintained that it would give the town council 'more teeth' in arguing for local concerns than would otherwise be the case. And that, he said, included the controversial issue of Green Belt development on the edge of Harpenden.

On that theme, Harpenden Society committee member John Davis said the need to meet government-imposed housing targets should be met by going 'upwards' rather than 'outwards', by building multi-storey apartments close to the town centre. If the NP could successfully influence the implementation of such a strategy, the Green Belt threat would be eased and the much-vaunted provision of 'affordable homes', notably for first-time buyers, would be made more achievable.



Rosemary Ross, on behalf of Harpenden Local History Society, expressed the hope that the NP, in aiming for 'sustainable' development, should include in its remit a requirement for new building, especially in the historic centre of the town, to be architecturally in character with adjacent – typically much older – properties.

Harpenden's seemingly intractable traffic and parking problems were inevitably raised at the March meeting. Within the context of the NP, no 'silver bullet' solutions were forthcoming, although there was one salient comment from a member of the audience who foresaw some form of London-style congestion charge being eventually imposed on drivers entering the town centre.

Name chosen for new secondary school

Harpenden Secondary Education Trust has announced the name chosen for the new secondary school to be built at Common Lane, Batford. (below) It will be called the Katherine Warington School, after the Rothamsted research scientist who lived in Harpenden for 90 years.

The name was one of over 700 suggested by pupils at primary schools in and around the town. It was initially suggested by Elizabeth Gilardo, an eight-year-old pupil from St Dominic Catholic Primary School, who said she wanted to suggest a name that had something to do with Harpenden and someone who had made an impact.

Phil Waters, chair of the HSET (and chairman of the Harpenden Society) Harpenden Secondary School Trust, said the trust looked forward to seeing Katherine Warington's name above the door of the new secondary school, which is planned to open in September 2018.



Above: Left to right: Philip Waters, chair of the Harpenden Secondary School Trust; Andrew Warington Wickham, great nephew of Katherine Warington; Jenny Wickham, great niece of Katherine Warington; Elizabeth Gilardo, pupil from St Dominic Catholic Primary School.

EDUCATION MATTERS

*The Harpenden Society is looking for **someone with a broad but enthusiastic interest in the town's educational activity, to help establish an Education Working Group**, whose aim would be to promote co-operation on school and college issues and initiatives within the wider context of Harpenden's cultural amenities. Interested? Then please contact Society Chairman Phil Waters on philwaters7@hotmail.com.*

Did You Know? From Harpenden's history 40 Luton Rd



'Above: St Helena's School in 1910'

Though to many it might sound a rather mundane address, for others a mention of '40 Luton Road' evokes memories of their sons' or daughters' babyhood, when St Helena's – its original name – served as Harpenden's much-valued Child Welfare Clinic.

Today the site, on the corner of Townsend Road, is occupied by the appropriately-named and architecturally-attractive St Helena's Court apartment block built by Plowright Homes, completed in 2004. Its residents and their visitors are reminded of 40 Luton Road's history by an impressive 'relief plaque' in the entrance porch by local artist Zoé McNeilly, (below) depicting its distinguished role in serving Harpenden's medical needs for over 70 years.

Built in 1897 as St Helena's College, a private school for girls, it fulfilled that role until just after the First World War when, in 1919, it was purchased by the Memorial Nursing Centre Committee for £3100. It was described as 'a suitable building with grounds comprising lawns, flower borders and a vegetable garden'.

Prior to its official opening in October 1920 by Lt Gen Lord Cavan (on the same day he dedicated Harpenden's war memorial on Church Green) some structural alterations were made including, notably, the installation of central heating.

Medical facilities included a dental and ophthalmic clinic, a minor injuries unit and a massage and electro-therapeutic clinic where, in particular, ex-servicemen were treated. Provision, from the outset, of a maternity and infant welfare room set the pattern for the centre's enduring role. Three District Nurses 'lived in'.

In 1941, Second World War priorities led to 40 Luton Road being requisitioned by the Army as a billet for soldiers of the Women's Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS), all clinical service having been transferred to the Red House in Carlton Road.

For three years after the end of the war the building was converted – still under military aegis – into five flats, but a further change of plan saw the clinics reinstated on the site, albeit after extensive alterations. No 40 Luton Road opened as Harpenden's Child Welfare Clinic in February 1952, and it continued to fulfil that role until May 1991, when it became a day centre and training & business centre for people with mental health problems under the title Community Meeting Point.

In 1999, the NHS deemed the building surplus to requirements and wanted to sell it. Despite a long and vigorous campaign to retain the building as a community facility, it was bought by Plowright Homes for demolition and redevelopment as today's St Helena's Court, comprising nine apartments.



Acknowledgement: the website of Harpenden Local History Society

EDITOR'S VIEW

Alan Bunting

The Neighbourhood Plan – its value questioned



It is important to emphasise that the following is strictly the Editor's View and in no way reflects a Harpenden Society perspective.

There is no denying that Harpenden Town Council's Neighbourhood Plan (NP) – the subject of a lively Harpenden Society meeting in March (see page 4) – is well intentioned, as indeed was the government's 2011 Localism Act, which prompted formulation of the NP and others like it elsewhere in the country.

It is touted as 'YOUR opportunity to shape the future of our special town' and purports to seek the views of residents 'on some of the most critical issues' that will affect them over the next 15 years.

In order to obtain those views, we were invited to complete a questionnaire, set out under five headings: 'Social Infrastructure and Community Facilities'; 'Transport and Movement'; 'Environment, Sustainability and Design'; 'Employment and Retail'; and 'Housing for Harpenden'.

Many people I have spoken to were totally 'underwhelmed' by the form of the NP questionnaire – its simplistic 'tick box' format, requesting one of five degrees of agreement or disagreement with given short-sentence statements, as well as the naivety of many of those statements, given the real world of Harpenden in 2017. A perhaps extreme example, inviting judgment, is the statement that 'Harpenden needs more public green space'. With Rothamsted Park, Harpenden Common, Kinsbourne Green Common and Batford Springs, as well as Church Green, Leyton Green and Lydekker Park in the middle of the town, we are surely richly endowed; no one could reasonably ask for more.

Another questionnaire statement which was surely not worth including, but for the exactly opposite reason, is 'More town centre parking is needed'. The need for additional car parking in Harpenden is so blindingly obvious that it was surely unnecessary to canvas opinion.

Results of 'tick-box' opinion polls or questionnaires can nowadays be rapidly and conveniently analysed by computer of course. But whether their results can be interpreted as reflecting people's genuine – rather than simplified – opinions is arguable. Admittedly, in the NP

questionnaire, a space below each set of statements was provided with the invitation to 'Tell us more....'. But one has doubts as to the weight carried by such individual comments when set against the 'tick-box' answers beloved of, dare one say, robotic statisticians.

Quite different questions about the value of the NP are those relating to its 'strength', something necessarily tied to the powers of Harpenden Town Council (HTC). Those powers are strictly limited, perhaps most notably on planning matters, where St Albans District Council is the decision-making authority, and Herts County Council makes the rules on highways and schools.

That is clearly why one of the most strongly-felt local issues, namely the question of building on Green Belt land, is barely touched upon in the NP questionnaire, apart from equivocally inviting comment on what is arguably a strategically-worded statement that 'Housing is more important than protecting green spaces'. Would people's answers perhaps have been different if the statement had been reversed, viz 'Protecting green spaces is more important than housing'?

And, as was confirmed recently by a Harpenden Society member's enquiry to HTC, the Neighbourhood Plan carries no local authority funding whatsoever. Its more crucial findings can be translated only into recommendations to SADC or HCC.

Those limited Town Council powers, on matters of funding allocation and on vital planning and infrastructure issues, in combination with the ingenuous nature of much of the questionnaire content, perhaps explain why there has been such a limited response. Disappointingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, only about 2000 questionnaires were completed and returned. And there has, as yet, been no indication of the demographic breakdown of respondents, by age, gender or length of time living in Harpenden.

So, the question must be asked: will the NP prove to have been worthwhile? Only time will tell. But many of those who care about Harpenden's future must have their reservations on the matter.



Council steps up green initiatives

Previous issues of this newsletter have featured heather planting on Harpenden Common and the opening up of Marquis Meadow at Batford for easier public access. They are just two examples of the efforts being made by Harpenden Town Council to, in the council's words, 'provide an environment that is pleasurable for the local community and that promotes biodiversity and conservation'.

Under her recently upgraded job title as HTC's 'people and wildlife officer', Heidi Mansell (below) is leading an ambitious 'Commons and Greens Education Plan' – albeit necessarily constrained by available funding – to ensure the attractions of the town's precious green spaces are maximised.



That involves, as she explains, 'raising awareness of Harpenden's natural resources and encouraging residents' involvement in conservation, where the aim is to create volunteering opportunities for people across the age range, in a programme scheduled to begin in October 2017. In addition, she says, there is an intention to increase opportunities for local schools to experience more out-of-the-classroom learning.

Improved habitat management and habitat restoration, for the wide variety of wildlife to be found in Harpenden's green spaces, is also part of the programme's remit, coupled with a drive to attract 'new audiences' to the flora and fauna of those green spaces.

Over a three-year period beginning in April 2017 a programme of community events throughout each year is planned, focussing in particular on Harpenden Common, Batford Springs Local Nature Reserve and Lydekker Park. (Above)

There will be three volunteer project days each month, mainly on Sundays from October to March, for each of which



it is hoped a lead volunteer will be designated, though with HTC staff personnel to be made available initially, if required.

A specific initiative this year for Heidi and her HTC colleagues is to help and support the nascent Friends of Lydekker Park group being set up primarily by local residents in the immediate vicinity of the park, with a view to enhancing its natural attractions as a peaceful 'green oasis' within a few minutes' walk from the bustling town centre.

Work is needed to maintain the park's inherent attractions, says Heidi, for which 'Friends' group volunteers can play their part, for example in livening up and re-seeding the greensward and flowerbeds, and thinning the trees. She adds that eight replacement trees are due to be planted in the park next year.

Everything possible is being done to encourage Lydekker Park's diverse bird population. That includes the ducks which intermittently frequent the pond at the north end of the park, which itself requires regular attention to keep it clear of unwanted algae and weeds such as glyceria. At the same time pond inhabitants, such as frogs and newts need to be encouraged. Frog spawn is a valuable food for coots and other waterfowl.

At the other end of Harpenden, work is planned at Marquis Meadow on the banks of the River Lea to plant more wild flowers, though backed by an annual selective grass mowing regime of the kind already followed over much of the town's commons.

By way of ensuring that HTC's green space programmes are meeting leisure users' expectations, regular on-site impromptu surveys are planned, with follow-up 'action' recommendations where appropriate.

Please send comments on this article or any other issues raised in this edition to the editor: Alan Bunting
editor@harpendsociety.org.
Sub-editor Harry Downie
Visit the Society's website –
www.harpendsociety.org

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SOCIETY PUBLIC MEETING DATES

21st September

19th October

7th December

Speakers are yet to be confirmed, check our
web site for details
www.harpendsociety.org