



Arts & leisure centre plans begin to crystallise

Outline proposals for the development of Harpenden's new Arts & Leisure complex in Rothamsted Park were put forward at a St Albans District Council cabinet meeting in late September. Their main principles, further spelled out by SADC leader Cllr Julian Daly, at a subsequent Harpenden Town Council meeting, are subject to local consultation until January 2017.

It is emphasised that – in the light of a feasibility study by The Sports Consultancy – for the £18 million project to be financially viable, it must be self funding, imposing no additional burden on council tax payers. Contributory funding is likely to be realised from the sale of the present Public Halls for housing, as has been widely suggested. Reference is made to 'an enabling development' on that site.

In increasing and enhancing the current swimming pool and sports centre facilities, SADC says the project has to meet the needs of the town for at least the next 30 years. Greatly increased car parking provision, to match the extended facilities and 'cater for the town's growing need', was recognised as a key priority, though detailed plans – for a multi-deck Amenbury Lane car park for example – remain unclear.

'Continuity of service', that is by minimising disruption for existing sports centre and swimming pool users while the redevelopment is in progress, is identified as a necessity in the proposals. Closure of some or all of the facilities for three to five months is expected.

The proposed new sports centre, envisaged for completion by December 2018, is planned as 'an integrated wet and dry' facility, encompassing the present swimming pool facility. The main six-lane 3500sq ft main pool would remain unchanged, but the learner pool would be doubled in size to 1400sq ft. The pool building's existing so-called health suite would be retained.



The outline plans show the new sports hall adjoining the pool building. It would be built on the site of the present under-used outdoor pool and part of its large surrounding grassed area – separated from Rothamsted Park itself by the existing tall beech hedge. It would be 16% larger than today's separate sports centre facility, at 7400sq ft, accommodating 160 – rather than 65 – health and fitness 'stations', some at first floor level. Other peripheral sports centre facilities, including a café and toilets, would be effectively transferred to the new pool and sports complex.

Within the shell of the present sports centre site would be developed what SADC refers to as an 'arts and cultural hub', targeted for completion by December 2019. It would replace and augment the facilities of the present Harpenden Public Halls. Its theatre/cinema auditorium would seat up to 500, compared with 410 in today's Eric Morecambe (Large) Public Hall. There would be three additional function meeting rooms, effectively replacing the present Small Public Hall.



Left & above: As a basis for evaluation by stakeholders, tentative plans of the 7400sq ft leisure centre have been prepared. They show the proposed sports and fitness centre adjoining the west and south sides of the existing swimming pool building. The large sports hall, bottom left in the plan, would be built on what is now the extensive green space (left) encompassing the present outdoor learner pool – within the tall perimeter beech hedge that forms the boundary with Rothamsted Park.

After substantial lobbying by Harpenden Local History Society, SADC also proposes a much-needed 'museum display area', as well as a café/bar area which could, when required, double as a further meeting room. It is envisaged that sports centre membership subscriptions and 'irregular user' fees would partially subsidise cultural hub activities.

Project planners acknowledge that there are inevitably unforeseen risks which could hamper progress, not surprisingly including possible construction cost inflation. Car parking and planning permission issues could also arise, relating to encroachment on Rothamsted Park green space.

New chairman-in-waiting for the society



The Harpenden Society has a newly installed vice-chairman, in the person of Phil Waters, (above) who will be proposed as society chairman next April, to succeed Chris Marsden, who will step down after fulfilling the role with distinction for six years.

Phil moved to Harpenden from London nearly 25 years ago. His children attended primary and secondary schools in the town and, perhaps appropriately, much of his working life has been associated with education. At the University of Southampton in the early 1970s, he focussed on politics and international studies, before joining the GLC's Inner London Education Authority as a graduate trainee, leading to his appointment as an administration officer at two ILEA further and higher education colleges.

He then became senior administrator of first a teacher training college and then a London polytechnic, in due course leading to his appointment in 1989 as deputy registrar and, in 2001, registrar and secretary, of Hatfield Polytechnic – by when it had become the University of Hertfordshire.

Following his retirement from the university in 2013, Phil continues some part-time consultancy work for the university and, in a voluntary role, he chairs the society of retired university staff.

Beyond his academic roles, Phil Waters has, for over 20 years, maintained a keen interest in matters relating to transport, which has included helping establish bus quality partnerships in St Albans and elsewhere in the county. He was the founding director and remains the chairman of University Bus Ltd, whose UNO pink- and purple-liveried buses are a familiar sight on routes 610 and 657 in Harpenden and beyond.

He is also a strong supporter of efforts to improve and enhance the environment, as a director of Groundwork Hertfordshire, a Hatfield-based charity 'with a green heart', set up 27 years ago to encourage young people, mainly in the 16 to 25 age group, to get involved in projects aimed at making the areas in which they live and work more attractive and more 'environment friendly'.

Lastly, but by no means least, as a board member of the County Sports Partnership, Phil takes a keen interest in the provision of sporting facilities locally, as evidenced by his Q&A contributions at the Harpenden Society's sport-focussed evening in September. He is secretary and a trustee of Harpenden Cricket Club and continues to play for the county's 'mid-week veterans'.

He was the founding chairman of the Harpenden Secondary Schools Trust, which promotes co-operation between the town's secondary schools.

That has led to his appointment as chairman of the Harpenden Secondary Education Trust (HSET), the trust behind the fourth secondary school planned for the town.

AWARDS ALERT 2016

We need your help in identifying the best of the new in Harpenden so that we can recognise what is worthy of an award. Please let us know of any new building developments or facilities completed in 2016 that you believe are worthy of our recognition. The premier award is a Plaque for outstanding projects. Other projects may be given a Certificate of Merit or a Letter of Commendation.

In 2015 the winner was the Glen Eagle Manor Development by Jarvis Homes.



Please complete either or both these sections below by March 1st 2017:

I wish to nominate the following for the 2016 Harpenden Society Plaque:

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I wish to nominate the following for a 2016 Harpenden Society Certificate of Merit or Letter of Commendation

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Please use this space for any comments

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Please email to 'awards@harpendensociety.org' or post to: Penny Ayres, Kinsbourne House, Kinsbourne Green, Harpenden AL5 3PE.

OR Go to the Society web site: www.harpendensociety.org

Our Awards Committee will visit and examine all nominations and select the winners. These will be announced at the AGM and in the Newsletter

Christmas Shopping promotion supported by The Harpenden Society

Harpenden Town Centre will be THE place for Christmas shopping this year thanks to an exciting initiative involving a number of local retailers. These retailers have put together special promotions, offers, gifts and ideas that will benefit Harpenden residents and make the High Street a magical place to shop, eat and drink.

The initiative launched on 21 November with a Christmas leaflet being delivered to all Harpenden homes. **Inside the leaflet residents will find coupon offers and details of a free prize draw which includes cash prizes and tickets to see the England football team play at Wembley.** There will be editorial coverage on Harpendia.com and weekly offers on the Harpenden Shopping facebook site

If you haven't already received a leaflet, one should be appearing through your door soon. Alternatively you can pick one up from the Information Point at the Town Hall.

This initiative has been supported by Harpenden Town Council, Brayleys, Lyndhurst Financial Management and The Harpenden Society who all support the ethos of a having a 'Thriving High Street'.



PARTICIPATING RETAILERS	
Brayleys	Musical Images
Breathing Space	Nice
C Y Hair	Oui
fonehouse	Purple
Fullwoods	R & M Butchers
Gallery Rouge	Rebecca Jade
Good Sports	Rollings Wine
Harpenden Arms	Serena Hart
Listers	Silver Palate
Loveweds	20/20 Vision
	Threads

Inspectorate meeting leaves SLP and Green Belt plans in limbo

The future of St Albans District Council's Strategic Local Plan (SLP) – and its contentious proposals to allow building of up to 1400 homes on Green Belt land around Harpenden – remains in limbo following a crucial meeting in late October convened by the government's Planning Inspectorate.

During the course of a four-hour meeting in a packed SADC council chamber David Hogger, the appointed Planning Inspector, listened to evidence from eight neighbouring local authorities, including Hertfordshire County Council, as well as from individuals, on the issue of the District Council's 'duty to co-operate' with its neighbours.

In what proved to be a captivating 25-minute presentation, Harpenden Society member and practising QC Joanne Whitehead criticised SADC's evident short-sightedness, in preparing the draft SLP.

She highlighted in particular its failure to liaise with the highways authorities on projected traffic growth on the town's roads, resulting from the planned scale of Green Belt housing development.

Development on such a scale would, she pointed out, also intensify the need for additional school places – an issue on which SADC's planners had failed to work constructively with Herts County Council.

At the end of the meeting it was clear that Mr Hogger – who has the power to throw out the draft SLP – took on board a massive amount of new information. He will accordingly require further time to consider its technical and legal ramifications. He indicated that he may be ready with a 'verdict' on the plan some time before the end of the year or in January.

Arts & leisure meeting highlights ‘cultural hub’ needs

Harpenden as a centre of cultural and arts activity continues to thrive. A large number of groups and societies in the town embrace a broad range of interests, notably music, dance, drama and literature, as well as different forms of art and adult education.

An opportunity for them to make their activities more widely known – with the chance of attracting new members – came at an open meeting of the Harpenden Society in October, where representatives from a dozen or so organisations were invited to make brief presentations.

At the same time each speaker was asked to spell out his or her group’s aspirations for the future, in the context of St Albans District Council’s proposals for a new ‘cultural hub’ in Rothamsted Park, intended to replace, and improve upon, the town’s present Public Halls complex.

Hurst Children’s Theatre Group

Jonas Hurst, who founded the group some 12 years ago, said it played a valuable role in building young people’s confidence while performing in front of an audience. They looked forward to rehearsing and performing in the group’s two major productions each year, currently staged in the large Public Hall. The venue had its limitations however and the theatre group deserved better. Designers of the new facility should have theatrical know-how, to ensure a big enough stage and adequate backstage facilities for handling scenery and so on. He cited St Albans’ Westminster Lodge theatre as a model.

Harpenden High Street Players

Mike Lees from The Players, whose origins go back to 1943, agreed, while adding that the envisaged 500-seat capacity at the new hub venue was too large for the kind of plays currently staged twice a year in the Methodist Church Hall (with its 120-seat maximum capacity), the Players’ home venue. Smaller spaces were also needed for theatre workshops and play readings. He pointed out that concerts and drama productions imposed quite different demands on a theatre venue. The cost of hiring a venue was also critical, especially bearing in mind rehearsal time, often over several days.

Harpenden Concert Band

Founded barely four years ago with only 12 to 15 members, the band now had about 40 enthusiastic players, said **Alison Fox**. It put on three major performances a year, in May, September and at Christmas, with attendance proceeds going to charity; some £500 was raised at the last concert. Emphasis was placed on encouraging young people to join, adding that the band nevertheless pursued a ‘challenging repertoire’. She said prime requirements for any venue where the band performed included a suitably open space and an adequate sound system, in combination with good acoustics.

Harpenden Choral Society

Four concerts a year, including a Yuletide Carol Concert, were given by what was emphatically an amateur choir, said **Alan Jackson**, albeit one with a membership approaching a hundred. The society currently used the High Street Methodist hall for its smaller events. But more ambitious productions, such as the recently staged *Elijah*, demanded

larger venues, able to accommodate the full choir, together with say a 40-piece orchestra, in front of an audience of perhaps 350. The proposed cultural hub theatre promised such a requirement, although the question of cost loomed large. He made a plea for the matter of acoustics to be addressed by the architectural planners at an early stage.

Magic Voices Music Choir

There were typically about 45 singers at Magic Voices rehearsals and subsequent performances, said **Liz Burnett**. The group had no particular cultural pretensions, tending to favour popular West End Show material which maximised the enjoyment and enthusiasm of its members and those who listened to them, for example at the town’s Christmas Carnival.

Lea Singers

Miriam McKay described her group as an ‘audition choir’. She said that because there were, living in Harpenden, ‘an extraordinary community of musicians’ belonging to different groups, a large venue like the one proposed for the new hub – able to accommodate audiences of up to 500 – was needed, where those groups could come together. She said Lea Singers had high aspirations, citing its performance of the *St Matthew Passion*, backed by professional instrumentalists. The choir performed regularly in churches, though not everyone, among audiences and singers, felt comfortable in church venues, so the proposed hub theatre facility was of interest. She also made a plea for flexibility of space, implying movable partitions to cater for different scales of workshop activity.



Above: **Jonas Hurst**



Above: **Mike Lees**



Above: **Alison Fox**



Above: **Alan Jackson**



Above : **Liz Burnett**



Above: **Miriam McKay**

Music Makers of Harpenden

Tim Painter said Music Makers, a registered charity, had between 40 and 45 members. A typical venue for the group's performances was High Street Methodist Church hall which, he maintained, had excellent acoustics. As to the comfort of audiences, it had often been commented that church seating needed cushions. But he said alternative venues, notably the existing Public Halls, were unaffordable, and in any case, regardless of cost, he felt that the Music Makers would be 'drowned' in a 500-seat auditorium venue of the kind envisaged in the new hub facility.

Harpenden Film Society

Colin Ratcliffe said the society, formed seven years ago, now showed about 25 films a year in the large Public Hall, to audiences averaging 120 people. He conceded that the present venue was 'falling apart'. Its seating, the central heating and the sound-system/acoustics all left a lot to be desired. However, he considered its central prominent location an important asset from a publicity standpoint. Consequently he feared that the proposed new theatre facility, would lose out through being 'tucked away' inside Rothamsted Park. He also questioned the availability of adequate car parking.

Herts Visual Arts

Hillary Taylor, an artist herself, said her county-wide group was dedicated to maintaining the cultural heritage of the arts. It was essential, she said, that the proposed hub incorporated a 'community space' which would do justice to events such as art exhibitions, while reinforcing the requirement for smaller workshop spaces, not necessarily aimed at an audience. She championed the cause of 'interactive arts events' citing the inclusion of an art display at a recent local history society exhibition.

Harpenden Local History Society

Gavin Ross said the society, established in 1973, held monthly evening meetings for its 200 or so members in the Small Public Hall, addressed by notable guest speakers, as well as quarterly exhibitions in Park Hall featuring historic photographs and other archive material, focussed on particular subjects or areas of the town. The great 'dream' of the local history society was the establishment of a Harpenden Museum; and the cultural hub proposals appeared to offer its possible realisation. A regularly-refreshed local history display area in the new hub had been mooted. But there was an important additional need for archive space to replace the inadequate cramped accommodation of the small room at Park Hall made available in recent years by the Town Council. That limited space had currently to be augmented with ad hoc storage in members' lofts and garages.

Harpenden Writers

Joyce Bunting explained that the group, created in 1997, effectively grew out of Workers' Educational Association creative writing courses, appealing in particular to those aspiring to have their work published. At its monthly meetings, usually held in the Quaker Meeting House, members read their work aloud for others to comment upon, or enjoyed talks by a guest author, poet or tutor. She said the proposed Arts Hub could provide an opportunity for members to liaise productively with other creative groups.

U3A

Eric Midwinter, a founder of the University of the Third Age movement nationally, said the organisation was formed in part to 'suppress ageism prejudice', asserting that those no longer in full-time employment were not 'social casualties'. The U3A was a self-help group, channelling older people's knowledge for the intellectual benefit of each other. He expressed the opinion that the present Public Halls failed to meet the needs of a body like the U3A, which required, ideally, a number of meeting rooms, each accommodating eight to 15 people. The future hub facility therefore needed the flexibility of partitioned spaces.

English Miscellany

From the floor of the meeting **Adrian Burrows** represented the countrywide folk dance group formed in 1975. He said folk song and dance groups such as English Miscellany could make good use of a facility like the one proposed. But because of the joyful and sometimes boisterous noise of the music, singing and even clog dancing, the need for good sound insulation was paramount.



Above: **Tim Painter**



Above: **Colin Ratcliffe**



Above: **Hillary Taylor**



Above: **Gavin Ross**



Above: **Joyce Bunting**



Above: **Eric Midwinter**



Above: A group shot of the speakers with Cllr Annie Brewster
2nd from left

Focus on sport as new leisure centre edges closer

As a thriving centre of enthusiastic sports activity, Harpenden is unquestionably a shining example. And, following **The Harpenden Society's** hugely successful September meeting on September 22, under the theme of **'Shaping the Future of Sport in Harpenden'**, the prospects appear even more encouraging.

Ten of the town's leading sports clubs accepted the invitation to tell the 80 or so society members and others gathered in Park Hall about their respective organisations and spell out their plans and aspirations for the years ahead. Crucially, the meeting was a rare opportunity to bring the clubs together, enabling them to air their concerns on a number of administrative and management issues, leading – after the formal proceedings were over – to a number of exciting inter-club co-operation initiatives. Several club representatives envisaged a Harpenden sports 'umbrella' organisation which could speak with a unified voice when required, notably in contacts with local authorities.

Society chairman Chris Marsden, who chaired the evening meeting, pointed out that such inter-sport collaboration would be valuable when responding to the St Albans District Council's request for constructive ideas in planning the new Rothamsted Park leisure complex, the go-ahead for which was effectively signalled by SADC councillor **Annie Brewster**, speaking at the end of the meeting.

Cricket

The first presentation of the evening came from **Geoff Newman, president of Harpenden Cricket Club**. He said its 700 members included 400 young people. They played on three grounds, at Rothamsted Research and St George's School, as well as on their own pitch on Harpenden Common, where its 45-year-old pavilion was due to be replaced before long. Geoff added that the club was actively involved in promoting cricket in local schools, including the new academy in Vaughan Road. But, he added (a common theme of the evening) there was a need for more coaches.

Rugby

Then **Peter Danby, president of Harpenden Rugby Club**, established back in 1921, said its 19 acre ground in Redbourn Lane had five pitches, and was home to 1300 members. It had a proud record, having nurtured five world class Rugby players. Peter said a major challenge was retaining the interest and enthusiasm of senior members after graduating from university. In consequence there was a shortage of coaches able to bring youngsters up to the club's high standards. The club was however financially sound. In collaboration with Harpenden (Hammonds End) Golf Club, some £100,000 had been spent over the last four years in improving facilities. He said that, unlike many other of the town's sports clubs, car parking at the Rugby Club was not a major issue. And he was willing to discuss weekend 'park and ride' arrangements with other clubs.

Indoor bowls

John Williams is chairman of Harpenden & District Indoor Bowls Club, whose council-owned four-rink facility was established in 1974 and is located at Waldegrave Park, off Aldwickbury Crescent. John said that, although his club's sport was aimed at 'those of a certain age', it was nevertheless vigorously supported. It had some 300 members, though it could accommodate a further 200. During the winter months the club happily hosted members of the town's outdoor bowling club (see below).

Outdoor bowls

Many Harpenden residents were, claimed its lady's secretary **Lyn Roberts** with a smile, barely aware of the **Harpenden Outdoor Bowling Club's** existence, perhaps because of its location, tucked away behind the houses in Spenser Road. But the town's 'hidden asset', in Lyn's words, was thriving. Its green was, she said, reckoned to be the finest in the county. She stressed that the club was by no means aimed primarily at retired people. It had 85 men and 50 women playing members with non-playing members taking the total to 200. The club ran four-week courses under the supervision of eight coaches. Lyn added that a number of club members headed off in groups each winter to the sunshine of Portugal, in order to keep up their bowling skills. As to the club's problems and concerns, the greatest was that of parking in the Spenser Road area.



Above; **Geoff Newman**



Above: **Peter Danby**



Above: **John Williams**



Above: **Lyn Roberts**

In a Harpenden Society initiative, St Albans' Westminster Lodge and Batchwood leisure centres – as an indication of what might be accomplished at the new Rothamsted Park development – were visited by 20 Harpenden sports and arts group representatives.

Football

Harpenden Town Football Club (HTFC), which plays in the South Midlands League, was founded as long ago as 1891, said **chairman Roman Motyczak**. For it to flourish as its members wish, investment of £500,000 was needed, he said, to install an all-weather surface, as well as floodlights, at the ground, adjacent to Rothamsted Park. Other plans include the setting up of an associated ladies' football club.

Many members of **Harpenden Colts**, aged 8 to 17, naturally aspired to become HTFC players, indicated Colts' **vice-chairman Ed Venner** at the meeting. He reported a thriving membership of around 900, including about 100 girls, adding that the club went out of its way to accommodate disabled youngsters. It enjoyed the volunteer services of some 140 coaches, including many parents. Because the club had no 'home' of its own, it had to find some £45,000 a year to hire pitches, some of those outside the town. It was hoped that a partnership with Roundwood Park School would lead to the provision of all-weather playing facilities, with funding assistance from the Football Association, though planning permission at the school had yet to be granted. But, said Ed, Colts' overriding requirement was for a permanent 'home', of the kind taken for granted by other sports clubs.

Golf

John Rhead from Harpenden Common Golf Club (HCGC) said the club had a venerable history, going back to 1894, and today had some 900 members. It was run in partnership with the nearby Harpenden Golf Club at Hammonds End. Many members, perhaps inevitably, were of retirement age, although there were over sixty members in the 23 to 40 prime working age category. He pointed out that, because golf was not a 'team game', it did not attract supporters. Rather it cultivated individual friendships among its players. They could 'just turn up and play', he said. Lessons were given to beginners, including 'seniors', as well as youngsters from 8 to 18. The club also operated a 'ladies' academy'. Also at the meeting was **Emma Clifford representing Aldwickbury Park Golf Club**, a commercially-operated enterprise set up in 1995, but now with an extended clubhouse. The club employed two professional coaches, she said, adding that it was keen to recruit more junior members, for which Saturday morning special sessions were organised.

Tennis

Harpenden Lawn Tennis Club had 12 courts, all with floodlighting, said **head coach Tom Dybell**. They included pristine grass and all-weather courts as well as five undercover courts inside the inflatable dome familiar to those using the adjacent Amenbury Lane car park. Evidence of the club's popularity was apparent in the frequent but unfulfilled demand for court space.

948 Sports Foundation

Bryan Short explained that 948, based in St Albans, was a charity set up in 2003, administered by eight trustees, with the aim of helping local youngsters participate in sports of all kinds, especially in home circumstances where parents had made sacrifices to help their children in that direction. He said over £250,000 – on average £20,000 per year – had been donated in the form of some 200 grants, to talented individuals, as well as to deserving schools and sports clubs.



Above: **Roman Motyczak**.



Above: **Ed Venner**

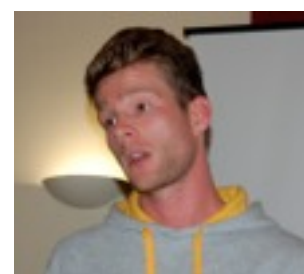


Above: **John Rhead**



Above: **Emma Clifford**

Below left: **A group shot of the speakers with Tony Marmo (SADC) 2nd left and Cllr Annie Brewster 4th from left**
Below right: **Tom Dybell**.
Bottom right: **Bryan Short**



Secondary school funding approved

An opening date of September 2018 has been set for the new secondary school to be built on farmland (pictured below) on the corner of Lower Luton Road and Common Lane, following the approval of funding from the Department of Education (DfE).

Despite being a year later than originally hoped, Hertfordshire County Council and the Harpenden Secondary School Trust (HSST), a partnership of local education providers, described the approval decision as a 'key milestone' in a town where the three existing secondary schools are greatly over-subscribed.



County Cllr David Williams said provision had been made for the 12 month delay in the project, arrangements having been made with other schools in St Albans district to accommodate additional pupils if needed. The HSST's chair Phil Waters (who is also chairman-in-waiting of the Harpenden Society), thanked Harpenden Parents Group and others in the town for their patience and continued support.

John Hunt

Those members of the Harpenden Society from 1997 to 2007 who remember John as our very able Secretary during that time will be saddened to hear of his recent death at the age of 88. John was also variously a vice-president and trustee of the Society. A scientist by profession, he showed the same meticulous attention to detail in his work for the Society while also being affable and approachable; a staunch and loyal supporter of the Society. After moving to Harpenden in 1983 he became very active in local charitable organisations, most notably the Lions Club. He and his wife Brenda left Harpenden in 2008 to live at Aston Clinton.

Hotel site gets green light

Plans for the redevelopment by Fairview Homes of the Harpenden House Hotel site have been finally approved by St Albans District Council. They provide for the demolition of 'outbuildings' and the creation of 37 homes, including five flats in the 17th/18th Century Grade II* listed hotel building on the 2.7 acre site.



The go-ahead was nevertheless met with criticism, notably from Harpenden Town Council. Cllr David Williams said the council was concerned that, while many thousands of pounds had been spent on architect and planning consultant fees, the development, in a prime Harpenden location, merited a 'trifling' £495,000 offsite cash contribution from Fairview towards the provision of affordable homes.

Fairview spokesman Mike Walker replied that because of high build costs, including the restoration of the listed building, the development could not viably deliver really affordable housing on the site. But the alternative course was to do nothing, leaving the site derelict for an indeterminate period. In addition to the £495,000 contribution, Fairview has agreed to give £88,821 towards the projected new sports and leisure complex planned for Rothamsted Park

Membership Notice Subscriptions

If there is a membership form inside this newsletter it means that you do not have a standing order for payment of subs but pay by other means each year.

The simplest thing is to fill in the form now, renewing the gift aid declaration if possible, and to send a cheque off forthwith.

For this we thank you wholeheartedly, as it will save many a phone call and email in the months to come. If you choose to make an electronic transfer instead it would be helpful to know.

Alternatively, you could use the form to start paying by standing order - we are always happy to see members use this payment method. We are also happy to answer any queries you may have.

Harry Downie Treasurer 01582 762259

Jan Smith Membership Secretary 01582 933222

More trouble-free commuting in prospect



'We'll believe it when we see it' could be the reaction of many Harpenden rail passengers to the projected service improvements announced by Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) in September.

The full benefits, in any case, are not due to be felt for another year and a half. Cross-London services through London Bridge Station are not due to restart until May 2018.

'New trains will provide additional capacity', says GTR, while 'modern track will make your journeys more reliable'. It declares that 'key service changes' by the end of (not May) 2018 will include improved Monday-to-Friday peak-time frequency. Eight 'up' trains per hour will serve Harpenden starting from Bedford and four from Luton.

Together with more 12-carriage – in place of eight-carriage – trains, it will mean 3000 extra seats into St

Pancras, doubling capacity in the morning peak, implying a better chance of Harpenden commuters getting a seat.

There is an opportunity for GTR service users to comment on the proposals at www.thameslinkrailway.com/your-journey/timetable-consultation.

While the Harpenden Society naturally welcomes GTR's plans, it is hoped that they turn out to be more than aspirations. Recent experience of repeated rush-hour service cancellations, causing commuters into London to arrive late for work three times in one week is not encouraging, to put it mildly. In the words of a recent Herts Advertiser editorial, 'Oh Thameslink, will it forever be jam tomorrow?'



Did You Know?

From Harpenden's history

A watery controversy

Long before today's Green Belt development wrangles or parking plan disputes, in fact a decade before the dawn of the 20th Century, Harpenden was riven with controversy. Residents were getting hot under their collective collars about the pond in the middle of the village, known by everyone as the Cock Pond because of its position directly across the road from the Cock Inn.



This watercolour painting of the Cock Pond in Winter is the work of Harpenden artist Ernest Hasseldine, a founder member in 1930 of what was to become the Harpenden Society.

Was it a popular attraction, adding to Harpenden's atmosphere of bucolic tranquillity? Or was it a muddy, smelly health hazard? The controversy raged, albeit in quite gentlemanly language, in the correspondence columns of the Herts Advertiser in 1890.

A Mr James Rothwell held the view that the pond 'is not in any sense ornamental...but very objectionable and unhealthy from the mud and refuse which is exposed to the sun's rays. The time has come when it ought, and can, be done away with, and the remaining hollow filled up and grassed over, adding one more to our many gem-like village greens'.

He added that there were by then only 'two or three gentlemen who use this pond for their cattle, but now that (mains) water is laid on throughout the village, it might, at very small cost, be made available (for watering the cattle)'.

From his rectory, the Rev Edward Vaughan was quick to respond: 'I am quite unable to agree with my good friend and neighbour, Mr Rothwell, in his wish to get rid of the pond...which would destroy one of the picturesque features of the village, and inflict a real unkindness upon the animals,

wild and tame, which find it their most convenient drinking place.'

His Reverence continued: 'Everyone knows that cows and horses prefer drinking the well-aerated soft water of an open pond, to the best water which can be given them from pumps or waterworks. Any notion of danger to health from the pond is quite groundless. I am quite sure that a very large part of my parishioners share my feeling on the subject.'

A third correspondent, who preferred to shield their identity behind the pseudonym 'Improvement' – perhaps because of his or her somewhat garbled English – came out in firm support of Mr Rothwell, as follows: 'This pond certainly is a nuisance. What beauty is there in a pool of water in the main street of the village? I say none, for the water is generally of a very dark and dirty colour, and after a horse and cart have been through, an unpleasant odour arises therefrom.

'It is also dangerous. The depth is not great, yet it happens, about four days at the time of the whole moon, the gas-lamps not being alight (another inconvenience), and the night being dull, one not used to the district might suffer considerably from a ducking'.

That anonymous support prompted Mr Rothwell to return to the fray: 'I admit that when the pond is full it is pleasing to see the feathered tribe enjoying themselves therein, and also to see the cattle contentedly taking their drink in passing. But the pond is not always full, and then the unsavoury part comes in. I have frequently seen a waggoner drive his team through the pond, churning up mud and water into the consistency of pea soup, after which the cattle enter for their accustomed drink.

'Cows, like other animals I have met with, don't exactly know what is best for them, and therefore we must educate them up. I agree with your 'Improvement' correspondent that a large trough be filled with mains water, thoroughly aerated and suitable for cattle. I would not forget the doggy tribe, and would provide a smaller trough for them and other small fry'.

The Cock Pond survived for almost 40 more years before Mr Rothwell's wish was granted for it to be drained and grassed over in 1927/8. Its position is marked today by the sensory garden on the green in front of Bowers Parade.

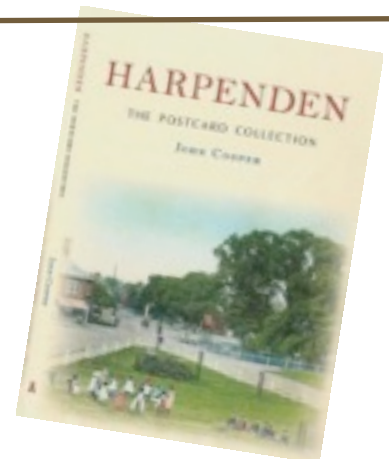
A new book 'The Story of Harpenden from Village to Town, by local author Jean Gardner, is now on sale price £3.00, from Harpenden Books and NEWS4U, 2 Station Road.

Acknowledgement: the website of Harpenden Local History Society

Postcard History

More than 170 postcards, many in colour, of Harpenden scenes captured by photographers and artists during the first half of the 20th Century have been brought together in a 96-page book compiled by John Cooper, who grew up in the town.

Published by Amberley Books, it is priced at £14.99 and is available from Harpenden Books or WH Smith.



EDITOR'S VIEW

Alan Bunting

Parking – any way out of the nightmare?

When my wife and I came to Harpenden in 1961 we were invariably able to park in the High Street without difficulty at any time to do our shopping. Fifty-five years on, car parking has become the town's day-to-day nightmare. The district council's decision to abandon its plan for a controlled parking zone (CPZ) for the Avenues area shows how apparently hopeless the situation has become.

There is clearly no short-term solution. Those drivers, including modestly-paid employees of retailers coming to work from outside the town who want to avoid onerous car park charges, quite understandably look for kerbside parking spaces.

But the reality is that, by the time most of Waitrose or Sainsbury's staff get into Harpenden in the morning, the Avenues area is already clogged with cars, many of them belonging to well-heeled London commuters.



Wanting to avoid payment for parking is a natural instinct for every driver. A separate, though inevitably interconnected issue, is that of finding a space in the town's official car parks. During the week, even at a cost of £7.60 a day, the railway station car parks are often full by 8.30am. Spaces in Bowers Way and Amenbury Lane pay-and-display car parks can be just as scarce.

In the longer term it seems inevitable that Harpenden residents will have to resign themselves to the unlovely sight of one or more multi-storey car parks like those at St Albans and Luton Parkway stations – or simpler and less costly 'second deck' structures. They would be an ugly intrusion on the townscape, but perhaps no worse than the unsightly station footbridge erected by Network Rail with no local community consultation.

As for the shorter term, let's give three cheers for the Harpenden Hopper community bus venture (see page 12), which could enable shoppers and possibly some commuters, who face regular parking frustrations, to leave their cars at home.

Restoring the Common's traditional heather

In a late autumn project aimed at restoring some of Harpenden Common's depleted flora, the Town Council has sought to spread the coverage of heather between the fairways of the golf course. As the council's commons and greens officer Heidi Mansell explains, it is hoped thereby to enhance the local ecosystem, attracting invertebrates, in turn further supporting the common's bird life.

A team of volunteers helped to take cuttings – or 'brash' – from established crops of heather on Nomansland Common, allowing them to be laid over a 650 sq ft area, about 100 yards south of Harpenden Common golf clubhouse. The turf had first to be lifted and the subsoil raked, allowing the dropped heather flower seeds to take root and germinate. As a precaution against unwanted raids by 'heather hungry' wildlife, especially rabbits, the area is protected by a 3ft-high wire mesh fence.



Hail the Harpenden Hopper!

Those without cars, notably the elderly, living on the outskirts of Harpenden, as well as drivers daunted by ever more nightmarish parking problems in the town centre, are sure to welcome the arrival of the Harpenden Hopper. As a new 'hop on, hop off' community bus service, it is scheduled to begin in January as a 12-month pilot project, initially linking residential areas to the north-west of the town with the High Street shopping area and nearby surgeries.

Initiative for the project – being run via a newly-established charity called Harpenden Connect – has been led by Andy Buchanan and Simon George, two local residents who recognised the need for such a service, especially following the withdrawal two or three years ago of the Grant Palmer minibus operation which served a similar area of the town.



Harpenden Connect has local authority support, notably from the town's two county councillors David Williams and Teresa Heritage, and town mayor Nicola Linacre. It is hoped also to attract funding by way of 'sponsorship' from retailers who stand to benefit from additional 'footfall' when the service is up and running.

At the Harpenden Hopper launch event in late September, Andy Buchanan explained that 'route approval' from the area Traffic Commissioners for the start-up service had been obtained, though other legislative formalities had to be completed before start-up.

Two second-hand (ex Herts CC) but smartly refurbished 15-seat Mercedes minibuses have been acquired, though initially one will be a stand-by vehicle. They will be based at the YWAM site in Ambrose Lane.

That initial route will run between Kinsbourne Green (near The Fox) and the town centre via The Close, Shepherds Way, Tuffnells Way, Wood End Road, Roundwood Lane, Park Rise, Park Hill, Luton Road, Hollybush Lane, Clarence Road, Byron Road, Wordsworth Road, Townsend Road, Luton Road, Sun Lane, Carlton Road (Red House), Stewart Road (Elms Surgery), Breadcroft Lane, Cornwall Road, Devonshire Road, Station Road, Victoria Road, Bowers Way (Davenport House), High Street, Amenbury Lane (Village Surgery), Avenue St Nicholas and Rothamsted Avenue.

There will be specific pick-up points, but the bus can be hailed anywhere along the route. A flat fare of £2.00 is anticipated although bus passes will be valid. The plan is for the service to operate three days a week, from 9.30am to 4.30pm.

At the launch event an appeal was made for volunteer drivers. Anyone willing to offer their services can contact Harpenden Hopper at hopen@harpendenhopper.co.uk or telephone 01582 638007.

Harpenden Society Meetings in 2017

Thursday evening meetings of the society during the Winter season 2017 are scheduled:

January 26;

February 23.

Details of speakers and topics will be posted on the society's website

www.harpendensociety.org.



Join us for our Christmas Get Together

Thursday Dec 8th at Park Hall, Leyton Rd.

7.30 Mulled wine and mince pie reception

8.00 Creating a vibrant Harpenden the Town Council's role

9.15 Free Prize Draw

Please send comments on any issues raised in this edition to the editor: Alan Bunting
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Sub-editor Harry Downie

Visit the Society's website –
www.harpendensociety.org

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