



New secondary school now 'up and running'

After a gestation period of five years or more, involving numerous legislative and planning hiccups along the way, Harpenden's new secondary school – the town's fourth – is now fully up and running. Katherine Warington School, occupying a 47-acre site bordering Common Lane and Lower Luton Road at Batford, is ready to take its second intake of pupils in September.

Visitors to the school, notably parents of future students eager to 'put their names down' for what will clearly be much sought-after places, cannot fail to be hugely impressed with KWS's brand-new buildings and facilities, with a total two-level floor area of some 97,000 sq ft. The school is understood to have cost in the region of £30 million and it is apparent that, in contrast to many UK schools built in earlier decades, structural and interior detail, delivered by Kier the construction group, is to the highest quality.

The school took its first students, numbering about 180 in six classes – in September last year. They were temporarily housed in what was to become the sports hall – itself now being revamped for its designed purpose. As head teacher Tony Smith explains, the plan is for a similar number of 11-year-olds to enter the school each autumn, which means it is likely to be five years before all KWS's classrooms are fully occupied – reaching the

school's designed 'capacity' of around 1150 children.

Nevertheless, all the classrooms, laboratories and other facilities are already fully equipped with desks, computers and even instruments for musical instruction. So, to the casual observer, there is a certain 'Marie Celeste' air of knowing much of the school will remain under-used, albeit progressively less so with each new annual intake.

But it is enabling classrooms and other spaces in the school building, including the main hall with its banked seating, to be made available to hire to outside groups and organisations for meetings, evening classes or other events.

A massive amount of earthmoving was involved in levelling the site for the new school, and the bulldozers continue their work in preparing what will be five sports pitches on the opposite side of the main building from Common Lane.

Inside the new school – turn to back page

Welcome back!

Despite tentative easing of the Covid-19 lockdown, Harpenden Society events remain 'on hold'. But we are aiming to return to something like normal in our newsletter publishing schedule, following our well-received interim four-page 'News Bulletin'. This 'full sized' Summer issue shows that activity in and around our town has been little diminished.

'Eric Morecambe Centre' could open next May



Work on the the conversion of Harpenden's existing Sports Centre in Rothamsted Park into the town's new Arts and Cultural Hub has continued through the Covid-19 lockdown period, albeit at a slower pace than planned because of the need for workforce social distancing. Together with a delay earlier in the year, caused by an unexpected structural problem with the roof of the building, mean that The Eric Morecambe Centre is unlikely to be ready before May 2021.

Extra borrowing by St Albans District Council to cover the resulting additional costs has been 'recommended', to ensure the total sports and cultural centre complex is completed, says Cllr Robert Donald, portfolio holder for commercial, development and wellbeing matters. The amount of additional funding by SADC is subject to ongoing negotiation with project contractors Willmott Dixon.

Entertainment and other events expected to be held in the new venue, housing a 511-seat theatre and accompanying local history museum and meeting rooms during the first months of next year, will instead remain temporarily in the familiar (82-year-old) Harpenden Public Halls.

Detailed layout plans of the ground and upper floors of the new arts and cultural facility have now been finalised. Comparisons with the equivalent (where relevant) Public Hall spaces show the vital increases in floor area, from a total of 6500 to 13,200sq ft. The main theatre auditorium will be 10% larger at 4400sq ft, accommodating 511 seats or (including the balcony) up to 725 people standing, augmented

further by an 840sq ft 'green room' and four changing rooms, each of 105sq ft.

Larger function rooms are another notable feature, three in number, ranging in size from 700sq ft (the designated museum area) to 1800sq ft, while new attention has been given to what might be termed hospitality features, comprising a 1160sq ft ground floor lobby and a similar-sized lobby above, leading on, respectively, to 1050 and 300sq ft bar areas. Among the noteworthy structural changes to the erstwhile sports centre building is a new more imposing staircase befitting a modern two-storey theatre facility, while also meeting statutory fire exit regulations.



The Eric Morecambe Centre is named after one of Harpenden's most fondly-remembered residents, in line with an undertaking given to his widow Joan Bartholomew. He lived in Oak Way from 1961 and later in Redbourn Lane until his early death at the age of 58 in 1984.

Volunteers wanted

We are always eager to make businesses and retailers in our town aware of The Harpenden Society and its role in promoting and encouraging local activities and initiatives. To that end, we are looking for more volunteers to deliver copies of our Newsletter (four times a year) to business addresses, in Harpenden and Southdown.

Please contact Hester Gabbutt, our Membership Secretary on membership@harpendensociety.org if you can help.

NB: We are always eager to welcome some new recruits to our team of stalwart newsletter deliverers to members homes.

Polite reminder

Thank you to the many members who have promptly paid their 2020 Society subscription. If you are not sure whether you have yet paid (£8 single/ £10 family) could you kindly double check. Any queries to the treasurer@harpendensociety.org making the payment into the Society's bank account – sort code 60-10-07, account number 28772946 – or by cheque made payable to 'The Harpenden Society' to our Treasurer Harry Downie at 66 Eastmoor Park, Harpenden AL5 1BW.

Do we have your email address?

Lockdown conditions in recent months made it necessary to circulate our slimmed-down Covid-19 News Bulletin – in place of a full-sized Spring Newsletter – to the majority of members by email. It was well received, given the challenges involved. However, it highlighted the fact that our (long standing) membership records are conspicuously lacking in email addresses.

It would be helpful if members could let Hester Gabbutt, on membership@harpendensociety.org have – or even confirm – their up-to-date email addresses.

Thank you.

WANTED

People like you who love Harpenden and want to preserve the best of it whilst moving forward to the future

Supporting climate change
Improving health and social care
New homes
A vibrant town centre
Healthy living



REWARD

By joining The Harpenden Society you'll help us to influence and initiate action to improve the things that matter in Harpenden.

Memberships now available from just £8.

Full details on facebook or our website



www.harpendensociety.org

Transport enthusiast wanted to join the Society committee

We need someone (male or female) to tackle the important issues in Harpenden and deliver lasting results that matter on a range of issues:

Lack of car parking spaces

Poor rail services

Noisy aircraft

Potholes

More buses

You'll be joining an active group who are dedicated in their efforts where you can influence and initiate action to improve the things that matter in Harpenden.

Contact Phil Waters (Chairman) to express your interest. email him at : chairman@harpendensociety.org

Freight depot threat to Harpenden Green Belt

For many Harpenden residents the former Handley Page aerodrome site south of St Albans might seem far enough away to be of relatively marginal interest. But its relevance, in the context of what is effectively now the District Council's conditionally-approved **Local Plan**, could have a significant impact on Green Belt areas around our town.

Two conflicting proposals for the site had been subject to fierce ongoing debate for a decade or more. Industrial developer SEGRO (formerly Helioslough) wanted to build a 'Strategic Rail Freight Interchange' depot alongside the St Pancras-Bedford main line. Local objectors to the SRFI scheme, largely supported by St Albans District Council, found the alternative plan, of building a 2000-home 'garden village' less objectionable, though not exactly welcome.

In early July government inspectors, having further scrutinised the latest draft of SADC's Local Plan, effectively approved the Plan but only on condition that the SRFI development was allowed to go ahead. It has meant the council now having to nominate sites for those 2000 homes elsewhere in the district, in order to fulfil its 'quota' of new homes demanded before 2036.

Only through sacrificing other Green Belt land, or through some kind of 'land exchange' deal with an adjacent local authority, such as Dacorum, can the requirement be met. And though official communications between the inspectors and SADC on the SRFI issue make no specific mention of Harpenden, it is clear that pressure will now grow to validate housing development on the edge of the town.

Most obviously the Local Plan's already designated 'North-West Harpenden' site alongside the A1081, between Bloomfield Road and the Bedfordshire boundary, becomes under greater threat. At a SADC-convened event and a later follow-up 'workshop' in early March, local 'stakeholders' and organisations, including the Harpenden Society, were invited to give their views on the 580-home projected development on over 40 acres of local Green Belt owned by the Legal & General insurance group.



A large number of concerned local residents attended the initial event, to view tentative plans for the site; 40% of the homes would allegedly be 'affordable', and the development would also include a 'two-form entry' (potentially 360-pupil) primary school, as well as a civic amenity 'flexible care centre'.

At the follow-up 'workshop' the combined vision of SADC and the land owner as to how the development and its surrounding infrastructure might look was put on display through a variety of somewhat Utopian artist's impressions, (above and opposite) on which attendees were invited to comment. They showed alternative housing possibilities, from high-density (nominally affordable) three-storey apartments, intended for the lower part of the site, alongside the A1081, to more spacious 3 / 4 bedroom houses closer to Ambrose Lane. All were depicted in idealised tree-lined surroundings. The proposals specify densities of between 25 and 45 dwellings per hectare (10 to 18 per acre).

Much of the discussion at the workshop centred around transport issues, relating in particular to the site's distance from the town centre and, as far as a potential commuter would be concerned, from Harpenden station. It was hoped (forlornly?) that many residents of the proposed new north-west Harpenden housing development would choose, with environmental altruism, to either walk or cycle into the town.



Pictures showing walkers and cyclists proceeding (in fine weather) along dedicated and unobstructed routes brought sceptical questioning from workshop participants as to how such vehicle-free routes could be accommodated. It had been estimated that to walk to the station from the more distant part of the site would take almost half an hour. Luton Road (A1081) was in any case acknowledged to be too narrow and congested to allow provision of a cycle lane, and the possibility of somehow establishing an effective 'by pass' via Ambrose Lane, Tennyson Road, Sun Lane and Bowers Way, for cyclists or perhaps even small Hopper-type buses, appeared impractical.



Similar logistical obstacles were mentioned in the context of getting people living on the proposed north-west Harpenden site to opt for bus rather than car travel. Unless a dedicated bus lane could (again forlornly) be created, bus travel would offer no journey time advantage over car use. That leads to the unavoidable prospect of a thousand or more additional cars adding hugely to local peak-hour traffic congestion on the A1081, to say nothing of the resulting demand for more (secondary as well as primary) school places along with medical and social services.



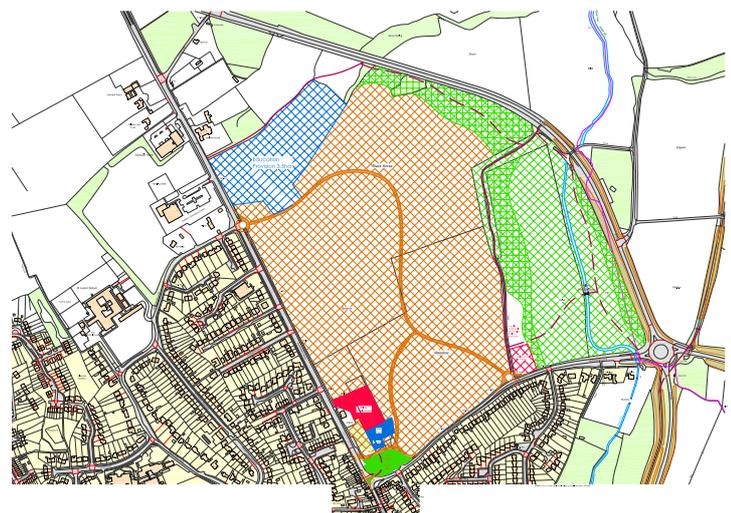
SADC could look again at Lawes' Redbourn site

In its search for alternative new housing sites, to compensate for the effective loss of the 2000 homes envisaged on the former Handley Page aerodrome, SADC could well update its Local Plan – yet again – to include for the first time land north of Redbourn alongside the old A5. Lawes Agricultural Trust (Rothamsted Research's parent group), the owner of the land, two years ago offered 116 acres – no longer required for research work – for housing. But its offer was effectively rejected by SADC, as evidenced by the non-inclusion of the site in any of the successive **Local Plan** drafts.



Up to 1000 homes were originally projected by LAT, but that was later cut back to 825. Should SADC decide at what is a relatively late stage to include the Redbourn site in a further revised Local Plan, it would contribute significantly to fulfilling the council's new housing 'quota' that needs to be met over the next 16 years or so. And, in so doing, it ought to ease the pressure to build on Green Belt closer to Harpenden.

General Layout and site Plan - **FOR ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES ONLY**



Herts CC's 'reversed localism' plan could abolish SADC

A proposal to effectively abolish all ten district and borough councils in Hertfordshire, including St Albans DC, to be supplanted by a greatly enlarged Herts County Council, recategorised as a 'unitary authority', has been unanimously opposed by current council leaders. They maintain that such a drastic reorganisation of local government would be to the detriment of the county's 1.2 million inhabitants. It would also necessarily be a direct reversal of central government's Localism Act of 2011, whose declared aim was 'to pass power back to where it belongs'.

The leaders declare that their councils have provided a lifeline to residents and communities during the Covid-19 pandemic, providing food and welfare support to those in difficulty, paying over £149m in grants to local businesses to help their survival, housing over 1000 homeless people, in addition to providing their regular vital services, from waste collection to the management of council

homes. They also criticise the timing of Herts CC's proposal, given the present need to ensure a focus on supporting communities and businesses to recover from the devastating effects of Covid-19.



County Hall, Hertford, the headquarters of Hertfordshire County Council.

They contend that a single unitary council for the county would be around three times larger and more remote than the size that central government has indicated it would deem acceptable for supporting local communities. It is now the leaders' intention to work 'with other key partners' to take account of the views of residents, with a view to putting forward alternative options to the single unitary council proposal.

Town Council plans new community project funding

With the £2.65 million proceeds from the sale of its Westfield allotment site – to Catalyst Housing for building 24 dwellings – Harpenden Town Council plans to allocate funds for a number of civic improvement projects around the town.

In several cases the work is conditional on the transfer of ownership (and hence the responsibility) of 'assets' including, crucially, Rothamsted Park, from St Albans District Council to HTC, for which protracted negotiations are, in late July, ongoing. Political differences between LibDem-controlled SADC and HTC with its Conservative majority are thought to be hindering the asset transfer.

Planned HTC investments include £310,000 for new play equipment for youngsters in Rothamsted Park and at two open spaces in the Roundwood/Wood End area. Other funding includes an allocation of £100,000 earmarked for a boardwalk at Batford Springs nature reserve, a similar amount for – rather non-specifically – 'improving existing footpaths and installing new ones' around the town, £50,000 for tree planting, and an unspecified amount (with additional external funding) for a new pavilion/clubhouse in Rothamsted Park.

If given the go-ahead at a council meeting scheduled for September, HTC hopes to complete the projects over the following two-year period. A concurrent initiative under the heading of 'Plastic Free Harpenden's aimed at eliminating all single-use plastics from everyday council operations and events.



Wood End play area



Roundwood Lane play area



Rothamsted Park play area

EDITOR'S VIEW

Alan Bunting



Legislative thrombosis?

Because we live in a (supposed) democracy, legislation at local as well as national level, is necessarily subject to 'due process'. New regulations cannot be rushed through, as they would be in a totalitarian society. But we pay the price for democracy's freedoms by way of – all too often repeated – delays. The enactment of St Albans District's Local Plan is surely a classic example. Over the course of three years or more, the Plan, initially referred to as a Strategic plan, has been drafted and redrafted again and again.

It now looks as though it has been approved by central government inspectors, but only on condition that SADC allows the huge, and hugely controversial, freight depot on the former Handley Page airfield site at Park Street to go ahead. It seems possible however that yet another Local Plan redraft could be needed to identify alternative sites in the district, to accommodate the 2000 or so new homes required to compensate for those which the council had been intending to allow on that aerodrome land.

It puts Harpenden's hinterland in the direct line of fire but leaving many wondering why no reference has been made in repeated Local Plan drafts to the site north of Redbourn offered by the landowner, the Lawes Agricultural Trust, which proposes an 825-home development, to help make up that 2000 home 'deficit' in the number of new dwellings required in the Plan to be built by 2036.

Should the Local Plan have to be tweaked again it seems inevitable that it will not happen smoothly, and certainly not quickly. Given all the whispers and

rumours coming out of SADC headquarters about the strained relations between the controlling Liberal Democrats and the Conservative contingent previously running the show, ongoing arguments on many issues, not least the Local Plan, will cause more delays.

It could be perceived that Harpenden issues are caught in that crossfire between the LibDems and the Tories. One only has to look at the long-standing plans for ownership and management of Rothamsted Park and other leisure areas in the town to be transferred from SADC to (Tory controlled) Harpenden Town Council. At the time of writing, HTC expected the transfer to have gone through – but it hasn't, for reasons that haven't been made clear. Whatever the reasons, they mean delay: a further example of what might be called 'legislative thrombosis'.

Less profound but no less annoying regulatory delays currently afflict numerous other issues in and around Harpenden. For example, controversy continues about the subject of parking in the town. A particular bone of contention concerns the question of how long shopkeepers and their staff should be allowed to park outside their premises, taking up space which could otherwise be used by their – revenue generating – customers.

Parking in the town has constituted a major and controversial problem for years, and no easy answers are in sight. It must be said however that the Covid-19 lockdown, clearly forcing many Harpenden commuters to work from home, have opened up many spaces in our main public and supermarket car parks. That has, for now at least, taken the pressure off local authorities, and Network Rail, in getting to grips with the parking challenges, which means that on one issue anyway, the kind of delay exemplified by the term 'kicking it into the long grass' is bearable.

Eating out in Harpenden, even more places to choose

Contrary to national trends Harpenden is seeing a surge in **new places** to eat and drink. With a wide choice of menu styles you'll be able to experience them for yourself this summer.



Seb's Kitchen



Cafe Aroma



The Silver Cup restaurant



Clubroom Brasserie



ATESH Turkish Cuisine

Taking a look inside Katherine Warrington School



Banked seating in lecture-room-style main hall



Head teacher Tony Smith is justifiably proud of KWS on its completion



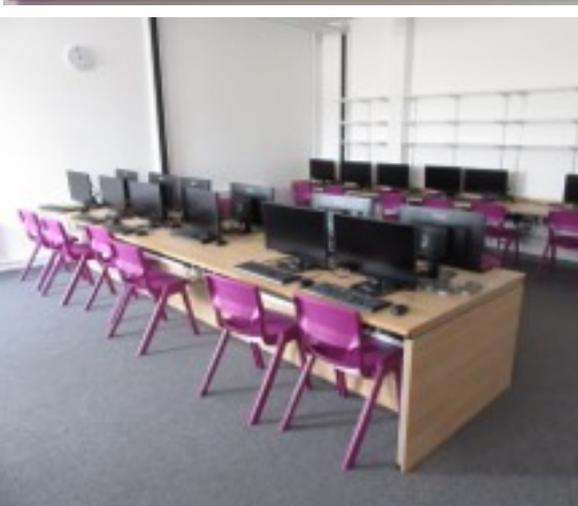
Superbly-equipped 'food technology' room



General teaching room



Engineering technology workshop



Computer tuition room



Drum kit in one of several music rooms



General science lab

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

DON'T BE SHY. SPEAK OUT AND SEND YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT ANY ISSUES RAISED IN THIS EDITION TO THE EDITOR ALAN BUNTING.

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