



Left to right: Eric Midwinter of the Harpenden Society, county councillor Teresa Heritage, Gerry Moir and David Law

Big turn out for Red House revival meeting

Madeleine Burton

madeleine.burton@hertsad.co.uk

A NEW push to resurrect Harpenden's Red House Hospital led to standing room only at a public meeting on the revival plan held last week.

The Harpenden Society hosted the meeting into the future of the town's Memorial Hospital which passes into the hands of the Herts NHS Community Trust – formerly the Herts Primary Care Trust – in April this year.

Trust chief executive David Law has made no secret of the fact that the hospital is in a poor condition and has said that residents of the town will be asked for their views on what they would like to see there.

He outlined the services his trust was responsible for when he spoke to the public meeting. They include district nurses, podiatry, outpatient therapy, cardiac rehabilitation, palliative care and children's health which he described as, "the human side of health".

The trust's assistant director for business development, Gerry Moir,

who has been given the task of looking at options for the Red House building, said they ranged from doing nothing, which was not realistic, redeveloping the site or selling it.

She stressed that whatever was done had to be on the basis of need and an affordable nursing home plus clinics was a possibility.

The new facility would need to cater for at least 50,000 people from Harpenden, Wheathampstead and Redbourn and would cost up to £3 million or more, she went on. The timescale would be 18 to 24 months.

Eric Midwinter of the Harpenden Society reminded the audience that the hospital was a "threatened valuable amenity" and the society had set up a taskforce to initiate and progress action.

He said that many residents firmly believed that it was vital to maintain local health facilities and establish a wellness centre within the town.

Chris Marsden, chairman of the Harpenden Society, expressed his delight at the large turnout and the "lively, intelligent questions being

answered so positively."

He went on: "There was clearly strong support from both the community and the officers for as much local care as possible, ranging from well-being facilities to respite care."

He added: "Although there are fond memories of the old 'cottage hospital' an overwhelming show of hands showed preference for modern services and facilities over sentimental attachment to an old building."

It is not the first time that there has been a question mark over the future of the hospital. In August 2006, placard-waving demonstrators staged one of the biggest-ever marches through the town in protest against a proposed ward closure at the Red House which was, at that time, in the hands of the St Albans and Harpenden Primary Care Trust (PCT).

Despite the strength of opposition and concerns voiced by local GPs about alternative care proposals, the PCT voted unanimously to close a 20-bed ward in the hospital which had been used by local people. A number of community-based services remained on the site.

You've got the Look! with development scheme

A LEADING local businessman has come out in support of a project set up to shape the future of St Albans city centre.

Look! St Albans is a forum where residents, visitors, businesses and local environmental groups can give their views about the iconic elements they believe best characterise the city centre.

The aim is to create specific design rules for new developments so that developers can work in tandem with the local population in the future to overcome regular bones of contention.

The Look! St Albans brief when it was set up more than a year ago, was to look at three specific sites that could be redeveloped now or in the near future – the Civic Centre South site which takes in Hertfordshire House, Drovers Way and the Coupers Garage site in Catherine Street.

Mel Hilbrow, director of St Albans Chamber of Commerce and St Albans Enterprise Agency, said that it was in the interest of the entire district to have a, "vibrant and beautiful city in St Albans" and businesses would thrive in such an environment.

He went on: "The perhaps once-in-many-generations opportunity for a major development in the city centre is the opportunity to help foster such an environment and to both invigorate the local economy and leave a legacy for the future to go with that left by our forebears of the mediaeval, Georgian and other periods.

"Such a development could attract major investment into the city and businesses would generally see that as a good thing; but the impact of the wrong development does not always lead to positive outcomes in the long term so the focus of the Look! St Albans project of setting quality standards

and guides is very much to be welcomed."

Mr Hilbrow questioned whether such a project without any enforcement would have an impact but thought that any business looking to make such a major investment should welcome a route which has the support of a significant part of the community.

Urging as many organisations and individuals to support the Look! St Albans design workshop report which is to be unveiled on March 20, he added: "We cannot guarantee any outcome but through the Look! St Albans route I believe that it is possible for residents and businesses to help both to encourage a development to happen and to get a better outcome than would be the case by not being proactive.

"That is why organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Enterprise Agency have been prepared to get involved with the project along with many other organisations and residents groups."

A joint presentation of the design workshop report by the Look! St Albans steering group and The Prince's Foundation for Building Community is being held from 7pm to 9pm on March 20 at Dagnall Street Baptist Church in the city centre.

Hard copies are now available in various locations including the central library and council offices, St Albans Abbey, St Peter's Church, St Paul's community centre and the Jubilee Centre.

At the presentation the winner of the £100 prize for the best photo in a competition organised by Look! St Albans will be announced and there will also be a report of the special prize awarded to pupils of Aboyne Lodge School for their participation in the project.



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