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WORKING IN GROUPS

AN OUTLINE FOR DISCUSSION BY
THE HARPENDEN SOCIETY COMMITTEE

OVER RECENT YEARS

there has been a trend in the Harpenden Society to set up small groups or working parties to study specific matters of local concern, with such professional or expert guidance as may be given by suitably qualified members. This has begun to bear fruit in that the Society is properly briefed, through them, to offer authoritative and responsible opinion and advice which may be of value to the local authority or to the community generally.

The Harpenden Urban Design Group, which consists of architects, engineers, town planners and kindred professionals with their homes in Harpenden but practicing further afield, was one such group which the Society called into being. It is now an independent body which the Society consults or confers with as occasion demands.

The following list summarises other groups already in existence and suggests some which might be formed:

i PLANS SUB-COMMITTEE: summoned into existence some years ago as a result of what seemed, at times, regrettable planning decisions, this group is the Society's planning watchdog. Its members scrutinise the official list of planning applications submitted to the local authority for approval each month. The group's chairman, together with a representative of the Urban Design Group, meets with the Council's Surveyor a few days before each meeting of the Council's Plans Committee for an informal briefing: they examine any questionable applications in detail, with the plans, and the group then submits its views in writing: these are taken into consideration by the Plans Committee when working through the applications.

ii HARPENDEN COMMON: consisting of Harpenden Society and Urban Design Group representatives, this group has already commented on U.D.C. proposals for limiting parking to specific areas of the common.

It might now extend its brief to include a critical appraisal of the present uses to which the Common is put - not only parking but picnicing, ponds, natural scrub and planting, cricket, golf, fairs - and try to foresee the results of the intensification in demand for leisure activities, for adults and children, which will come with the increases forecast for population, traffic, and leisure.

The question of a corps of volunteer 'vigilantes' (as e.g. the Ashridge 'Guardians') has been raised and needs further study.

iii LEE VALLEY: Another Society/Urban Design Group studying the natural history, amenity, environmental and economic development aspects of the river valley within the U.D.C. boundaries. It ties in with - and builds on the work of - a former Urban Design Group working party which has already submitted to the Council a feasibility study of the Eastern Region railway land which has been bought for the town by the Council, and is now gradually being implemented. The Report on the Lee valley is urgently needed in order to anticipate and warn against further inroads, by building development, into an area of potential natural beauty and amenity which needs very careful conservation if it is to be of value to the community of Batford, housed on the slopes which overlook it.

iv TOWN CENTRE RE-DEVELOPMENT: Primarily an Urban Design Group working party, with a Harpenden Society representative, studying the future development of the Town Centre in relation to traffic, buildings, shopping, pedestrianisation, greens and trees, street furniture, and general amenity. It has met with members of the Planning staff at County Hall dealing with Harpenden's town centre, to compare notes and discuss probable developments: when the H.C.C. traffic survey and study material for Harpenden is available it is hoped further discussions will take place. At present the lack of integration between traffic and planning proposals - at every level - presents a very real threat to the character of the town.

OTHER MATTERS IN NEED OF STUDY AND ACTION FOR WHICH GROUPS MIGHT BE FORMED:

v FOOTPATHS: Their signposting, use or dis-use, maintenance and improvement: suggestions for new walk-ways or bridle paths: publicity as to their whereabouts and encouragement for the use of footpaths.

vi A MUSEUM: (1) Historical Records: documents - ecclesiastical and legal, maps, engravings, paintings, portraits, old photographs, picture postcards, letters, bill-heads, registers, etc: slides and colour transparencies: books - a local bibliography: statistics - population, trades and professions, etc.

(2) Bygones: examples of local crafts and pursuits, models, curios.

(3) The people of Harpenden: the fascinating history of the last 100 years in Harpenden - reminiscences of its personalities, customs, crafts, and now almost legendary characters - still lie in the memories and among the family possessions of old Harpenden residents. These need recording - by tape and transcript and photograph - before they are lost forever.

(This would be essentially a collection of things to see and hear and handle: the written history of Harpenden is currently being covered by Professor Lionel Munby's W.E.A. course on local history.)

vii HISTORIC BUILDINGS: those already listed: others - potential for designation: the 'Conservation Area', its implementation and planning procedure under the new legislation: analysis - descriptive, with annotated plans, and photographic records.

viii TREES AND LANDSCAPE: Tree survey: analysis of open spaces and other elements essential to landscape: proposals for planned planting or landscaping: special areas requiring detailed study, e.g. E.R. Railway land.

ix ROTHAMSTED PARK: A study of existing amenities - sport - swimming, general recreation and natural enjoyment: public facilities: proposals for future conservation, expansion and improvements in the light of increasing demand and national policy.

x NATURAL HISTORY: Archaeology and landscape: local flora and fauna - their habitats identified and species recorded: conservation, augmentation, colonisation, etc.: records by photography, tape, and field study.

xi AMENITY:

Litter, rubbish, skips, dumps, tips, refuse-disposal, street cleansing, pollution (noise, air, water, etc.): eye-sores: street furniture and the urban scene - seats, litter bins, bus shelters, lighting columns, railings: small pockets of neglected urban waste-land - negotiations for their reclamation or restoration as contributions to the general amenity of the town: workparties to do this.

xii CIVIC NEWS-LETTER:

a bulletin on local amenity, conservation and development: possible sponsors and contributors - a combination of Harpenden Society, Urban Design Group, Conservation Society, Herts. and Middlesex Trust for Nature Conservation, et al.

Editorial body to include a Press Officer to keep the local press supplied with information, news, articles on matters in which the Societies are engaged.

S I N C E

the primary object of any group on these lines would be to anticipate anything likely to contribute to the deterioration of the town scene and at the same time to begin to implement and enact the suggestions for town improvement

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becomes of primary concern. How best can the citizens of Harpenden be involved in these operations?

AT THE JULY COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE HARPENDEN SOCIETY suggestions for possible sources of manpower and support were made: it would be to these that a programme drawn from some of the foregoing ideas might appeal. Three categories were suggested:

- 1 As individual members - to increase the numerical strength of the Society in its representations as a responsible civic body, so that its opinions, authoritatively backed by its professional membership, carry the weight of numbers:

Those organisations contributing to SPOTLIGHT ON LEISURE:
National Council of Women, Townswomen's Guilds, Women's Institutes, Church Women's Guilds and Groups, et al.

British Legion, Round Table, Rotary, Toc-H, Political Parties, United Nations, et al.

Harpenden Drama and Light Operatic Groups, Ladacan, Horticultural Society, Garden Clubs (formerly 'Allotment holders'), Young Farmers' Clubs, Antique and Historical Societies, et al.

Harpenden Open Youth Club, the Council of Youth and its associated organisations, Sports Development Council, et al.

- 2 As influencers - to make known the work of the groups and the Society as opportunity presents: experts willing to act as sponsors or 'consultants' to the groups - there are many such skilled and qualified authorities living in Harpenden.

In addition to the organisations listed above, from among whose membership a considerable number of 'influencers' could be called upon, there are the members of professional organisations whose

← Luton District Hqs can be the Control of Aircraft Noise

homes are in Harpenden - Civil Engineers, Architects, Scientists (especially within the Rothamsted and Ministry of Agriculture establishments), Industry and Commerce.

3 As workers

- the manpower to carry out the field work, research, study, drafting, meticulous (and sometimes tedious but ultimately rewarding) labours which will yield the information needed upon which the groups can base their authoritative conclusions and programmes for action.

Individual enthusiasts from any of the groups mentioned in the first list.

Council of Youth and associated organisations and clubs
Scouts, Rangers, Guides.

The staff and senior pupils of schools already engaged in environmental studies, with the support of the County Council's Adviser for Environmental Studies - a member of the Education Department's staff.

(It may be with this latter group that the highest hopes of help lie. At the recent exhibition held in conjunction with the "OUR LIVING SPACE" meeting in Harpenden Hall, the range and quality of the exhibits brought home the extent to which schools, and many dedicated staff, are committed: a generation is rising which will be more aware of its physical surroundings, more capable of analysing them and more demanding of improvement than ever before. They are also more willing to be involved in the active work of research and participation.)

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Many of these suggestions and opinions have been voiced in meetings of the Society's committee before now: we have tried to gather them together so that we can discuss them and perhaps look forward to reaching out to a wider public than hitherto. Through such groups we believe it may be possible to involve more Harpenden people in the active enhancement of their already pleasant town in coming years.

ERIC BRANDRETH
JOHN SAVAGE
PAT WILSON

SEPTEMBER 1970.