

## THE HARPENDEN SOCIETY

When the Harpenden Society was formed in 1930, it was

"to exert a strong local influence to safeguard the amenities of Harpenden and its environs and to preserve, develop and improve the features of Harpenden which are pleasing and those which promote the well-being of its inhabitants".

The Society continues to care for the amenities of today's town and, through its membership, seeks to represent the interests of the residents. It makes representations to the local Council, the County Council and other Authorities as to what should or should not be done to preserve the town's distinctive character and to improve on that character where appropriate.

It pays special attention to building development, roads, footpaths, open space, the prevention of disfigurement by badly placed advertisements, the unnecessary destruction of trees, the preservation of buildings of architectural or historic interest and to the amelioration of any circumstances which detract from the amenities of the locality.

The Society's work is not restricted to criticism but is directed to positive proposals and planning. It has a close working relationship with the Harpenden Urban Design Group and undertakes joint studies of the many problems which arise from the town's rapid growth and continuing urbanisation.

The local Council often seeks the views of the Society, as the representative amenity body for Harpenden, and we, in turn, support the Council where it shows determination to preserve the good features of the town. The Society is usually represented at local public enquiries.

The Society's affairs are conducted by a committee of officers and up to twenty-one elected members. Sub-committees are responsible to the main committee for the various aspects of the town's amenities which they are set up to deal with. The main committee and its sub-committees meet regularly and keep the members informed of their activities through an occasional newsletter. In addition, the committee arranges:

- (i) Annual and Special General Meetings. The formal business is usually followed by a speaker.
- (ii) Lecture meetings which are open to the public.
- (iii) An annual visit to a place of historic or architectural interest, or one associated in any way with the objects of the Society.
- (iv) An annual dinner: ~~the first to be held this year.~~

## SUB-COMMITTEES AND WORKING GROUPS

Over recent years the Society has set up several small groups or working parties to study specific matters of local concern, with what professional or expert guidance qualified members are able to give. The members of the groups are not necessarily members of the main committee.

This policy is beginning to bear fruit in that, through the groups, the Society is able to offer qualified and responsible advice or opinions which are of value to the Authorities or the community generally.

### 1. Harpenden Urban Design Group

This is an independent body which consists of qualified architects, engineers, town planners and members of allied professions. For the most part they live in Harpenden but practice further afield. They are the professional arm of the Society.

### 2. Plans Sub-Committee

This was formed as a result of what seemed, at times, to be regrettable planning decisions by the Authorities. It is the Society's planning watchdog. Its members scrutinise the local Authority's monthly list of planning applications (which are submitted for approval), and the Society's representative and a representative of the Urban Design Group look at the plans, examine questionable applications in detail and then submit comments in writing to the Council.

### 3. Upper Lea Valley Group

The Society and the Urban Design Group prepared a joint report in 1971 entitled "The Lea Valley in Harpenden". Subsequently a public meeting was called and an "Upper Lea Valley Group" set up. This now functions as a virtually autonomous body with the support of the Harpenden Society.

In addition to concerning itself with the amenities of the valley the group is active in a number of ways. It is advocating the use of the former railway line as a public footpath to link with other public rights of way in the district. It has also undertaken, at the direct request of the local authority, a study of the Council-owned lands bordering the river. Implementation of this report is now under way, some of the work being done by the Council itself and some by voluntary labour, in work parties organised by the steering committee of the Upper Lea Valley Group.

### 4. Town Centre Working Party

This group consists primarily of Urban Design Group members but includes a representative of the Harpenden Society. It is studying the future of the town centre in relation to buildings, traffic, shopping, greens and trees, street furniture and general amenity. The group consults with members of the Herts County Council's Planning staff who are responsible for the town centre proposals and discusses developments in the Conservation Area with them and with the local authority. Probably the biggest single threat to the character of the town is/

still the apparent lack of integration at every level of traffic management and urban design.

More recently the group made a detailed survey of buildings within the Conservation Area and recommended:

- (i) that a small number of additions should be made to the Statutory List of Buildings of architectural or historic interest, and,
- (ii) that the appearance of many others, including groups of buildings which do not in themselves reach the standard required for statutory listing, is nevertheless of a special quality without which the centre of Harpenden would lose its essential character: these should be protected against indiscriminate demolition.

5. Harpenden Common Sub-Committee

This is a joint working group of Harpenden Society and Urban Design Group members. It has commented on the Council's proposals for restricting parking to specific areas of the common and has put forward its own suggestions. It is now considering the wider aspects of the common in the future in view of the intensification of use to which it is being put. It is preparing, at the request of the local authority, a programme of conservation and positive management of the common and its vegetation and trees.

6. Footpaths Sub-Committee

This group was formed to investigate the condition of local footpaths, to ensure that access is not impaired and to encourage their use. It pays special attention to notices of closure and diversion and makes representations where appropriate.

7. Local History Society

A sub-committee has recently been formed to explore the desirability of setting up a Local History Society - possibly with its own Centre. Over recent years an increasing interest has been shown by local residents in the history of the town, and a W.E.A. Local History class is at work on a History of Harpenden for the press. There is also a certain amount of material available, in the form of records, pictures and bygone to form the nucleus of a local collection.



8. Newsletter

The Society publishes a periodic Newsletter to keep the members informed of activities, coming events and matters of local interest and concern.

OTHER POSSIBLE GROUPS

In addition to the work being undertaken already by the foregoing sub-committees, there are other matters requiring action for which groups might be formed.

9. Trees and Landscape

The trees and open spaces in and around Harpenden are one of the main contributions to its character. It is essential to safeguard them against wanton destruction and to see that replacements are planted before maturer specimens die out.

A first step would be the preparation of a tree survey, covering the town area by area.

10. Rothamsted Park

A study of the existing facilities for recreation and sport which are available to the public might be made, together with the general amenities and landscape. Following such a study it would be possible to make recommendations in the light of local needs and national policies.

11. Natural History

To study the local flora and fauna, recording species and their habitats in the area, with a view to conservation and colonisation.

12. Historic Buildings

There are a number of buildings in and around Harpenden of architectural and historic interest but few of these have been measured and recorded. Such surveys could be undertaken to include plans, sketches and photographs.

13. General Amenity

The Harpenden Society is well aware of the numerous small (and some large) details of our environment which do so much to create or destroy a town. They need constant attention. Included under such a head would be pollution of any kind, clean streets, the problems of litter, rubbish dumps and skips, eye-sores, seats, bus shelters, lighting columns, railings, road signs and pockets of neglected waste land. A working group could watch over these things and negotiate for good design, improvement or reclamation as appropriate.

## THE HARPENDEN SOCIETY

### QUESTIONNAIRE

In the preceeding paper the present work of the Harpenden Society is outlined together with some projects it is hoped can be undertaken.

Please tick YES or NO

1. Are you a member of the Harpenden Society at present?  
(membership form attached)
2. Would you be prepared to help in any of the groups listed below?
  - a) Harpenden Urban Design Group
  - b) Plans Sub-Committee
  - c) Upper Lea Valley Group
  - d) Town Centre Working Party
  - e) Harpenden Common
  - f) Footpaths
  - g) Local History Society
  - h) Newsletter
3. Would you be prepared to help in any of the groups listed below if they were formed?
  - i) Trees and Landscape
  - j) Rothamsted Park
  - k) Natural History
  - l) Historic Buildings
  - m) General Amenities
4. Have you any further suggestions for groups which the Society should consider?  
(Write below)

5. Have you any special qualifications, talents or interests which might be beneficial to the Society (e.g. Arboriculture, Architecture, Town planning, Photography, Cartography, knowledge of Local History, etc.)? (Write below)
6. Have you any suggestions for topics or speakers for the:  
(a) General Meetings of the Society;  
  
(b) Lecture Meetings.
7. Have you any suggestions of places to which the Society might make its Annual Visit?
8. Do you have any constructive criticism or comment on the general work and organisation of the Harpenden Society?

Signature .....

Address.....

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Telephone No. ....

It would be appreciated if this questionnaire, when completed, could be returned to the Hon. Secretary of the Harpenden Society (Tel. No. 8888)

THE HARPENDEN SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO BECOME A MEMBER OF THE HARPENDEN SOCIETY AND RETURN THIS PAGE TO :

MRS D.A. BROWN,  
Hon. Membership Secretary,  
The Harpenden Society,  
4 Wheathamstead Road,  
HARPENDEN.

I/We desire to join the Harpenden Society and enclose.....as my/our subscription for the coming year.

Name (Capitals).....

Address .....  
.....  
.....

Telephone No .....

Date.....Signature.....

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION

The minimum subscription is 50p for an individual and 75p for a joint/family membership.

For those over 65 or under 18 years (or receiving full-time education), the minimum subscription is 25p for an individual and 38p for joint membership.

The subscription for members joining the Society on or after 1st September in any year will be deemed to run until 31st December the following year.