

## Annual Report 2013/2014

### Celebration 2014 Looking back - Looking forward

All The Harpenden Society members,  
friends, helpers and interested Harpenden  
residents are invited

7.15 pm Wednesday 26 March 2014  
Fowden Hall  
Rothamsted Research



...and what a busy and fruitful year it has proved to be...The Society was the catalyst for the Christmas 2013 Sunday Shopping scheme...the struggle to protect the town from over-development was sustained...the Red House Forum, co-organised by The Society, saw the business plan for a Health and Wellbeing Campus completed and agreed...The Society's pioneer volunteer running of the library on Wednesday afternoons was successfully launched...support for the concept of the new secondary school for the town was forcefully affirmed...the fight to enhance the facilities at Rothamsted Park was maintained...there were small victories in The Society's efforts to improve Harpenden's public transport ...the second year of our primary schools creative arts competition – this time the title was 'Hail Harpendonia!' - proved to be a second major triumph...

....all this, and much more, will be on show, with a chance to talk with the Committee members responsible for the diverse elements of The Society's achievements, together with the brief formal annual general meeting, and a chance to enjoy the prize-winning entries in the 'Hail Harpendonia!' schools competition...with music, song and conversation all a part of the proceedings...

### ***A message from Chris Marsden, chairman of The Harpenden Society***

*"It is with some sense of satisfaction but also anxiety that I look forward to another active year for the Society. The satisfaction comes from our achievements in 2013, notably regarding negotiating the opening of the Library Express on Wednesday afternoons with volunteers from the Society membership, real progress on the Red House and helping to keep our High Street thriving. The anxiety concerns the potential loss of the proposed Secondary School in Harpenden if a suitable site cannot be agreed fairly soon and the increasing pressure to build houses on the Green Belt which surrounds the Town."*





### A message from Alison Steer, President of The Harpenden Society

*"I am delighted that The Harpenden Society has enthusiastically achieved many of last year's promises, such as helping to get the Red House scheme up and running. The Committee and Working Groups have worked exceedingly hard and I would like to express my heartfelt thanks for all they have done in the last year. They will continue to work on our behalf next year when some of the issues will be quite problematic, among them the threat of green belt building without proper infrastructure and the development of the new secondary school. Please remember this is your Society: we are always looking for new members and for any member interested in joining the committee or one of the Working Groups. --The Harpenden Society is in good heart and ready for all the challenges to come."*

## ...AND THEN THINGS STARTED TO HAPPEN...

Chris Marsden spoke in last year's CELEBRATION 2013 report of The Society's 'burgeoning achievement'. In this the CELEBRATION 2014 report we may proudly point to some of that blossoming coming to a fuller bloom.

### THE THRIVING HIGH STREET

Many of you will have noticed a number of changes in 2013, and in the first two months of this year; Woosters fashion shop and Barnfield Hairdressing Academy closed. But Fullwoods Ladieswear Boutique is planning to expand to a larger unit in Leyton Road. A new Hairdresser - Gatsby & Miller, a new Costa Coffee in Station Road and two more Charity Shops have also opened.

Plans are already underway to encourage Harpenden retailers and businesses to work together and use digital technology more extensively to make them more effective in 2014. News about this will be featured on the Society web site: [www.harpendensociety.org](http://www.harpendensociety.org) and the Harpenden Shopping Twitter feed: @HarpendenShops. Details also on the Society web site.



Above: The launch of the 'Harpenden Christmas Shopping' Facebook and Sunday shopping initiative in late November 2013. Aarti Parmar of AV82 who created the graphics and Ron Taylor (The Society Publicity manager) who masterminded the campaign.

### THE VOLUNTEER LIBRARIANS

20 January was a red-letter day in the history of both The Society and Herts County Council. For the first time ever volunteers were allowed to manage a component of the library service. In a polished example of partnership between local authority and voluntary body, the Hertfordshire Library Service and The Harpenden Society have signed a contract whereby The Society operates a Library Express service on Wednesday afternoons. Hitherto the library was shut on Wednesday afternoon, the only session of the week when the library was closed altogether. Henceforward the front part of the library will again be open for business from 13.00 to 19.00 hours.

Twenty or more volunteers from among The Society's membership answered the call to literary arms and Liz Trounce valiantly agreed to act as their organiser, with Kay Smith her able deputy. The Society is indebted to Councillor Teresa Heritage, Taryn Pearson, Herts chief librarian and Claire Barraclough, Mid-Herts area librarian for joining us in the amicable negotiations that enabled the project to be smoothly pursued..

There was an initial training session at the library on Wednesday 15 January – and then came the big day...

At 13.00 hours on Wednesday 22 January The Harpenden Society officially took possession of the town's much-admired library.

Please note; new volunteers would be welcome; contact [secretary@harpendensociety.org](mailto:secretary@harpendensociety.org)





# AFTER ALL THESE YEARS...SOME MOVEMENT ON THE RED HOUSE

There was a major moment in the year when the Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust published its executive plan for the conversion of the Harpenden Memorial Hospital site into a Health and Wellbeing Campus, heralded by the invigorating slogan 'integrating health and social care.' This will provide a much-needed localised facility offering health and welfare services, including some in-patient care, to the town.

This forward-looking programme was revealed on Monday 9 December to a meeting of the Red House Forum, the ginger group formed by The Harpenden Society to urge a refurbishment of this much-loved amenity. The Forum is chaired by Chris Marsden and its co-organisers are County Councillor Teresa



Heritage, who holds the public health portfolio on the Herts County Council, and Eric Midwinter, Convenor of The Society's Health and Social Welfare Working Group.

The concept – described by Mark Carman, the NHS project manager as 'a game changer' - has been heartily approved by the Herts Community NHS Trust. After the legal, architectural and financial details have been ironed out and the range of services agreed, the approval of the Secretary of State will be sought in the summer of 2014. If all goes well, the new campus should be up and running by the autumn of 2017.



*Above left to right: Eric Midwinter, David Law, Mark Carman and Teresa Heritage at the Red House meeting*

## HOUSING AND PLANNING; THE THREAT

The question of future housing development continues to exercise the agile minds of The Society's Built Environment Working Group.

The situation on the Strategic local Plan (SLP) is that every planning authority must have one. That includes St Albans District Council (SADC) of course. They don't have one at present as their attempt to get one through the council failed last November. Without one we are at the mercy of the National Planning Inspectorate who determine all appeals by developers against planning refusals. The NPI report to Eric Pickles and cannot take account of the views of local people or the local authority.

In order to create a new SLP, SADC have decided to call for three reports from independent consultants. These cover a review of the green belt boundaries, an assessment of local housing needs and finally a detailed assessment of which parts of the local green belt should be built on. In the green belt review the consultants have identified four sites in Harpenden as contributing least to the purposes of the green belt. We believe the methodology used by the consultants for this purpose is bogus. In practice they are saying that if building on the land does not cause coalescence with other towns then it is not contributing to the green belt. On this basis they could have chosen any land round Harpenden.

The needs assessment report proposed that over 11,000 houses – close on the equivalent of the size of Harpenden – should be built by 2030, with some 2000 units in Harpenden as well as the 400 already in the pipeline.

At the Harpenden Green Belt Association we are taking it very seriously, and we are working together with the Harpenden Society in view of the threat to the town. We are planning a public meeting once the public consultation has started so that residents can be fully informed



*Above: Ongoing building of large houses at Faulkners Place in North Harpenden by Taylor Wimpey*

# PUBLIC ORDER; KEEPING TOWNSFOLK VIGILANT

What has emerged as the most appropriate activity for our Public Order Working Group to undertake is as an advisory hub.

The Working Group helps to get police advice and information out to the public in Harpenden. It does this by collating information from divers sources and summarising it in its regular reports; others are then asked to ensure that relevant content from these reports finds its way to the Harpenden Society Newsletter and the website. It is intended to formalise this mode of conveying advice in the future.

Helping to get information out to the public is what the police have said they most want us to do. The local press does likewise, but in a different (and often sensationalist) context. The area it covers extends far beyond our specific interests; and its emphasis is generally on short-term reporting

rather than on providing contextual analysis and advice.

We trust members of The Society and others will take advantage of this useful service.



*Above: Alan Jackson, (left) Convenor of the Public Order Working Group and David Lloyd, Police & Crime Commissioner*

## THE NEW SECONDARY SCHOOL; THE MISSING PIECE

The plan for a new secondary school in Harpenden has proved controversial. It is claimed that it is being built on land which should be left unsullied and so close to busy roads that it will cause a traffic problem.

Unluckily, in an over-developed town like Harpenden the only place to build a school would be on a big field on the outskirts and it would always be near a busy road – Harpenden has 22,500 vehicles generating 25,000 round trips a day while 34,000 vehicles pass through the town daily on the A1018.

Children have been the factor often forgotten in this sometimes bitter discussion and, at primary as well as secondary levels, the whole St Albans district is showing critical shortfalls in provision. According to its charitable remit, The Harpenden Society must work to improve and sustain the well being of Harpenden as a whole. What greater challenge could there be than to fight for decent schooling for today's children and also for tomorrow's?

The Society has not become involved in the 'site' argument, apart from expressing the warning that undue protraction of that debate might lead to troublesome delay or even the abandonment of the project. Taking the educational line, we have argued that, at the extremes, a good school on a bad site is better than a bad school on a good site. One of our mantras has been 'children are more important than grass'.

Thus The Society has welcomed the new school and had tried to begin a more positive, lively and humane conversation about what sort of school it should be. It is imperative that it should have a bright, not overshadowed, beginning, hitting the ground running in parity with our three existing and well-regarded secondary schools. The new school must be 'fourth equal, not fourth best'. It surely is time to address these real issues.

Nb go to The Harpenden Society website to sign the petition supporting the new secondary school proposal: [www.harpendensociety.org](http://www.harpendensociety.org).



*Above: A glimpse of people at the secondary school site consultation at the Grove School last December*



# PUBLIC MEETINGS

This season's public meetings were all well-attended, not least the 'Red House' discussion when the hall was filled to overflowing. The Society continues its policy of relating these meetings to issues with which its Working Groups are currently concerned, the better to keep abreast of any response from members or the public on such topics. There were meetings

**26 September 2013** Police and Crime; the New Commissioner's Role

David Lloyd, Police and crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire

**24 October 2013** A New Beginning for the Red House  
David Law, Chief Executive Herts Community NHS Trust

Mark Carman, Project manager for the 'Health and Wellbeing Campus' plan

**12 December 2013** The Library; Its Role in Our Community

Taryn Pearson, Assistant Director, Community Services and Libraries, Health and Community Services for Hertfordshire

**30 January 2014** Transport in Harpenden; What's Going On?

In conjunction with the Harpenden Transport Highways and Transport Forum

A panel of experts.

**This year's summer event was a fascinating visit to Rothamsted Research**

The Society also attracted lots of attention, despite the inclement weather, with its new marquee at Harpenden's Discovery Day on the Common on **15 June**.

The Society also successfully staffed stalls at two other events, both in the public halls. These were the Davenport House PPG Health Fair on **28 September** and the Seniors Forum Fair on **1 October**. These two events featured the Red House Forum and the new plans for the Harpenden Memorial Hospital.



*Above: 'A full house for the Red House'*

*Below: Alan Jackson (standing) David Lloyd (seated) at the Public Order meeting*



## The Harpenden Society Working Groups

Members may recall that in the summer of 2011 The Society made a fundamental change in its operational structure with the creation of SEVEN Working Groups to cover all aspects of town life and services. This was to ensure that whatever issue arose or needed to be raised, there was a Working Group available to meet the question. These are chiefly if not exclusively 'virtual' groups, communicating by email and telephone, so that The Society has at its behest teams of advisers on all these subjects. Six of the Working Groups are up and running in good order, namely, Public Order, Built Environment, Economic Activity, Transport, Health and Social Welfare and Education and Leisure, with just Environmental Services awaiting take-off. If you feel you might be able to help with any of these activities, contact The Society at [secretary@harpendensociety.org](mailto:secretary@harpendensociety.org)



*Above: Chris Marsden with Town Mayor Rosemary Farmer at Thompsons Close for an Environmental Awards ceremony*

# 'HOLD THE FRONT PAGE'

The Society continues to publicise its meetings and report on the outcomes. Progress of campaigns and the Environmental Awards results are also publicised.

Press releases in the past year have gone to a wider range of media which now includes all the local weekly newspapers, news websites and quarterly publications such as the Town Council Forum.

An article submitted by the Society was published in 'What's On'. Websites which carry Society news and events include [harpendia.com](http://harpendia.com), [hertfordshire.com](http://hertfordshire.com) and [mumsguideto.co.uk](http://mumsguideto.co.uk).

Local radio stations such as Radio Verulam receive news for broadcast too.

## TRANSPORTS NOT ALWAYS OF DELIGHTS

The role of the Transport Working Group has become mainly that of keeping a watching brief on a cluster of transport issues which effect the town. There has been little over the year in the way of positive change but one helpful development has been the introduction of the Transport Forums initiated by our local county councillors.

We arranged one such forum as one of the Harpenden Society's public meetings on January 30th where many issues were raised that our Transport Working Group may be able to take forward.

Full details in the Spring edition of The Harpenden Society News accompanying this report.

Make a date in your diary for this exciting evening.  
March 26th  
Fowden Hall  
Rothamsted Research

## Celebration 2014

**Looking back-Looking forward**

**4.30-6.30**

'Hail Harpendonia' Exhibition and awards ceremony for this year's Harpenden Society primary schools creative arts competition.

Children teachers and parents all welcome.

**7.15 Doors open.**

A welcome to members, friends and visitors  
Bar and Music

A chance to view the schools exhibition and to talk to Working Group Convenors and other Society officials and committee members about the achievements of last year and the prospects for the coming year.

**8.10**

**Brief Official Annual General Meeting**

Election of officers, presentation of accounts, appointment of auditor and other authorised business.

**8.30**

**The Harpenden Society Awards winners.**

Each year The Society makes these prestigious awards for projects that have added value or appeal to the town's environment.

**8.40**

**Mr Stephen James, the Associate Director of Rothamsted;**  
a short presentation on the campus developments.

**8.50**

Another opportunity to see the exhibition and chat to The Society's leading lights.  
Bar and Music

**9.15-9.30**

**Guests depart**

**NB. All times subject to minor change**