

Annual Report 2014/2015

Celebration 2015 Looking back - Looking forward

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

7.15 pm Wednesday 22 April 2015
Fowden Hall
Rothamsted Research



...and it's been another busy and fruitful year...The Society was the spur behind the September Food Fair in conjunction with the Farmers' Market and catalyst for the Christmas 2014 Christmas Shopping promotion...the struggle to protect the town from over-development was heartily sustained, with even a suggestion that electoral action should be taken to draw attention to the flawed district Strategic Plan; instead we planned a major public meeting for all the local parliamentary candidates to discuss their 'Vision for Harpenden'; Housing, Infrastructure and Sustainability' ...the third year of our primary schools creative arts competition – this time the title was 'Forward to the Future; Harpenden 2100' - proved to be a third triumph...

...all this, and much more, as is reported in these pages, 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 'Forward to the Future; Harpenden 2100' schools competition and hear the results of The Society's prestigious annual awards for building projects that have added appeal or value to the local environment...with music and conversation all a part of the proceedings...

...we cordially invite members, friends and helpers of The Harpenden Society to join us as we look back to what we achieved last year and look forward to what our intentions are for next year...

A message from Chris Marsden, chairman of The Harpenden Society

"Another busy year, my fourth as Chairman; how time flies! I originally agreed to do three years, now it looks like being at least five. Anyone else like to have a go? Seriously, it is time the Society started looking for new leadership. All organisations need regular inputs of new energy.

This year, and I expect next, has been and will be particularly busy because of the continuing need for us to campaign for the future sustainable development of Harpenden, with the emphasis on sustainability – no development without accompanying infrastructure, preserving as much of the Green Belt as possible.

Other areas of activity that been pursued with great commitment include: keeping the front of the Library open on Wednesday afternoons thanks to our willing volunteers; the relentless pressure from the Red House Forum and the Society's public meetings in keeping the issue of its redevelopment high on the NHS agenda; the Food and Drink festival extension to Harpenden and the Christmas Sunday market were strongly supported by the Society, and much else"





A message from Alison Steer, President of The Harpenden Society

This has been another exciting year for The Harpenden Society. I do hope that you have enjoyed the quarterly Harpenden Society News, admirably penned by Eric Midwinter, which keeps us all up to date with what is happening. The aim of The Society is to stay neutral but to enable members to hear the relevant facts on important issues that effect Harpenden.

I would like to give thanks to all the committee members for the sterling work they have done over the whole year for us and of course Harpenden. If there is anyone who would be interested in joining the committee or one of the working groups please do come forward - it will be worthwhile and rewarding. Thank you and I look forward to another great year.

BIG ISSUES

HOUSING ALARM

A dominant feature of the year has been The Society's fight, alongside the Harpenden Green Belt Association, to thwart the go-ahead of the ill-conceived Strategic Plan for 436 new dwellings to be built annually in the district over the next twenty years, threatening the green belt and, perhaps more importantly, given the lack of assurances about infrastructural improvements, imperilling the already fragile balance of the town's sustainability. The Society has hosted public meetings, written to the press and urged its case consistently, pointing out the legal, planning and social flaws in the scheme. For instance, the Planning and Control office claims 57 or 13% of these houses will be available for net inward migration, that is for the 142 people who will arrive outnumbering those who leave. The remainder – 87% - are to cater for 'natural growth', that is the normal rise in population within the district. But the District Council has offered no hint of how in a fierce market-driven housing trade it will effectively police the situation so that this huge majority of local people will benefit.

Such has been the intractable refusal of the District Council to budge an inch on any of these matters, The Society was forced to accept the view that some other

agenda, a political one perhaps, was being pursued, rather than one based on rational principles. This even led to the remarkable scene of several voices urging that Chris Marsden, as Chairman of The Society, should actually stand as a candidate for the Hitchin and Harpenden Constituency at the coming general election on a 'Responsible Housing Development' ticket. There were even offers of financial help. The argument was pressed that the town's civic society, charged by its legal purpose to defend and enhance the social and environmental life of the town, could not lightly sit by when, in its view, the town was being subjected to maladministration fuelled by what appeared to be political expediency.

In the end, and with some reluctance, the committee agreed not to make so unprecedented a move but instead assented to a major campaign within the ambit of the election to raise this significant issue with all candidates, inclusive of an invitation to a public meeting that would scrutinise their attitude to so synthetic, dangerous and apparently untouchable a building scheme regardless of the infrastructural shortfall. The message would be to withhold support from any candidate unwilling to denounce this wilful and negligent programme.



LIBRARY VOLUNTEERS

The quiet, business-like progress of The Society's library volunteer project is the best indicator that all is well. Under Liz Trounce's steadfast management, a Wednesday afternoon and evening Library Express programme is available to Harpenden library users – otherwise the library would be closed at those times.

It remains the clearest signal to the town that a civic society, as well as arguing and persuading, may sometimes be competent to uphold a practical and much-needed service. During the year Liz Trounce was one of the two Society members to receive the Harpenden Society News 'Without Whom' (...it simply wouldn't have happened) award...



SHOPPING TREATS

...while the other 'Without Whom' award went to Ron Taylor, The Society's publicity officer and much else, the energetic star who has transformed, in poster, leaflet and in other ways and designs, the image of The Society. Beyond all that, he has taken on the high street almost single-handedly with his varied attempts to boost the town's retail trade. Initiatives such as the brilliantly presented 'Food and Drink Festival' last September in conjunction with the Farmers' Market or efforts to ignite the Christmas trade locally with more fire have enjoyed some success and have owed much to Ron Taylor's perspicacity. Visit after visit, call after call, meeting after meeting, his vim is unfailing and both traders and customers are heavily in his debt.

Below: Breathing Space owner Keith Lunn shows off the Christmas point of sale on display across Harpenden.



HOSPITAL HOPES

The Red House Forum has sustained its 'ginger group' quest in hope of the transformation of the Harpenden Hospital site into a Health and Wellness Campus for which an excellent plan has been drafted. Although several hurdles remain everyone was delighted to hear a statement at the packed public meeting on health matters in January from David Law, Chief Executive of the Herts NHS Community Trust, that the Trust are firmly wedded to the idea of local provision of services and that the reborn Red House should be up and running in 2018.

We are delighted to report that John Harris, a Society committee member, prominent in the Davenport House Surgery Patient Participation Group and a Governor of the Re-development Board of Luton & Dunstable Hospital, will be a voting member of and the Red House Forum representative on the Harpenden Memorial Hospital Project Board.

This is the team established in and by the Herts Community NHS Trust.



Above: Information leaflet available at key points around Harpenden

FIGHTING FUND

The Society asked for a donations for a fighting fund specifically to assist our efforts with regard to the over-development with which Harpenden is menaced and the campaign to support the Herts NHS Community Trust's ambitious plans for the Red House. We were delighted to receive gifts totalling over £2000 and we thank generous donors for their kindly aid...which leave space for a timely hint that the fund is by no means closed and we would be delighted should further donors be prepared to make a contribution.

The decision to raise subscriptions has worked out smoothly enough and, following one or two years of anxious dips into our relative slim funds, this year has shown us back in the black to the tune of £1200 surplus on the year's dealings and a rather stronger reserve fund of some £7000. All credit to the composed effectiveness of incoming treasurer Harry Downie. And, on that topic of members' subscriptions, we should not fail to record the arrival of Susan Vinther our enthusiastic new Membership Secretary. Thanks to Susan for her sterling start to her task – and thank you, too, to the faithful team of volunteers who so conscientiously deliver the Harpenden Society News.

LAWFUL ADVICE

As regular readers of the Harpenden Society News or users of The Society's website well know, our Public Order Working Group continues to act as an advisory point for police and allied advice and information for the public in Harpenden. Members and friends of The Society will be pleased to learn that it has been decided to change the title from the rather forbidding 'Public Order' usage to the more user-friendly and clear-cut 'Community Safety Working Group.' The advice ranges from tip-offs about the latest scams to notification about burglary incidence. Readers and members tell us that this is proving very helpful.



ARTS HUB

The Society continues, with the representatives of other local societies, to be involved in the We are...Harpenden project which hope to obtain an 'Our Place' government grant for a 'virtual hub' to deepen and extend the arts, culture and heritage dimension of the town's life. By seeking new audiences for established practices, by identifying more communally friendly venues for activities, by widening the range of the types of provision on offer, We Are...Harpenden would endeavour to normalise the artistic and heritage components of the town's being so that it would become the natural, the ordinary, life-enhancing experience of most inhabitants. You can keep up to date with progress via facebook: WeAre Harpenden or twitter @WeAreHarpenden What's next? A small group of the organisers are putting together a plan for submission to DCLG (Department for Communities and Local Government). This plan is firmly grounded in the responses received during the consultations, roadshows and other community conversations.

We Are...
HARPENDEN

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. These Working Groups are, for the most part, up and running in good order, namely, Community Safety Working Group, Built Environment, Economic Activity, Transport, Health and Social Welfare, Education and Leisure and Environmental Services.

However, we are always on the look-out for new members to enliven and renew the energies and resolve of the existing volunteers. We are also in search of a Press Officer and a Fund Raising Officer to help in those two very important roles. If you feel you might be able to help with any of these activities, contact The Society at secretary@harpendensociety.org

This mention of the Secretary allows us a chance to hail the fine incumbent in that post, the indefatigable Bob Fletcher (below) who has given The Society and the town another year of quiet, selfless but always highly efficient service.



NEW SCHOOL

The Society, like its friends and allies in the Harpenden Parents Group, are solidly behind any progress in improving the shortfall of both primary and secondary places in the town. In particular, it has backed the concept of a new secondary school, even though the choice of site has proved to be controversial. In February The Society hosted yet another sell-out packed meeting, this time on the subject of schools. It was an even-tempered and serious occasion, with the anxious questions of parents sympathetically handled by a distinguished panel of County Councillor David Williams, Ben Bardsley, chairman of the Harpenden Parents Group and Philip Waters, Secretary of the Harpenden Secondary Schools Trust, the body responsible for progressing plans for the new school.



Above: Ben Bardsley, (right) chairman of the Harpenden Parents Group, County Councillor David Williams (centre) and Philip Waters, (left) Secretary of the Harpenden Secondary Schools Trust (HSST)

Children have been the factor often forgotten in this sometimes bitter discussion. According to its charitable remit, The Harpenden Society must work to improve and sustain the well being of Harpenden as a whole and has given priority to the needs of tomorrow's citizens, the children of today. Thus the Society did not become involved in the 'site' argument, apart from mourning the ensuing delay. We have tried instead to foster a more positive and humane conversation about what sort of school it should be, especially in terms of its relationship with the surrounding community.. It is imperative that it should have a bright, not over-shadowed, 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'.

Harpenden Secondary Planning Area Forecast											
Harpenden Secondary Planning Area Year 7 Demand											
	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	
Year 7 Places	572	572	572	572	572	572	572	572	572	572	
Demand	656	647	691	740	819	795	832	827	748	731	
Shortfall	84	75	119	168	247	223	260	255	176	159	
Forms of Entry	2.8	2.5	4.0	5.6	8.2	7.4	8.7	8.5	5.9	5.3	

TRANSPORT TOPICS

As another of The Society's endeavours to make its public meetings directly relevant, the January 2014 occasion was given over to the knotty issue of public transport. This was organised in conjunction with the Harpenden Transport Forum and The Society's Transport Working Group convenor Donald Robertson nobly joined a panel of train and bus providers to answer searching questions from the many users present. This proved to be a most useful exchange.

The Society welcomed the new vehicles and improved frequency of the 321 service but regretted the continued absence of real time information at bus stops while in response to two Herts County Council consultations we made clear our objection to the proposed cutting of subsidies for evening and weekend bus travel.



'STOP PRESS'

Further to our decision to hold a public meeting for all the local candidates in the forthcoming general election, we are pleased to announce that this will be held at 8.00 p.m on Tuesday 21 April in the conference centre at Rothamsted Research.

'Vision for Harpenden' Housing, schools, health and wellbeing, roads, parking, water, sewage and sustainability.

Entry to the event will be free so demand for seats is sure to be high. To ensure your place please book your seat now via The Harpenden Society web site: www.harpendensociety.org

Watch out on The Society website and for email messages from The Society for further details.

Vision for Harpenden

Housing, schools, health & wellbeing, roads, parking, water, sewage and sustainability

A chance to ask the Parliamentary candidates about their Harpenden visions:

Rachel Burgin, Labour

Peter Lilley MP, Conservative

Pauline Pearce, Liberal/Democrats

John Stocker, UKIP

Richard Wise, Green Party

Tuesday April 21st 8.00-10.00pm
Rothamsted Conference Centre

FREE entry on the night.
Book in advance to secure your place via The Harpenden Society web site
www.theharpendensociety.org



Make a date in your diary for this exciting evening.
APRIL 22nd
Fowden Hall
Rothamsted Research

Celebration 2015

Looking back-Looking forward

4.30-6.15

'Towards the Future; Harpenden 2100'

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.

8.00

Brief Official Annual General Meeting

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

8.20

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.

8.30

Volunteers for Harpenden

a short presentation on the launch of the new Volunteering concept in Harpenden

8.40

'Where we are now'

a short presentation by Rothamsted Research on the opening of the new Conference Centre

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