



White Paper heralds tougher demands on housing developers

Harpenden's MP Bim Afolami, addressing a Harpenden Society online Zoom meeting of over 70 society members in late February, said a major change in the way housing development planning applications were handled was mooted in a government White Paper coming before Parliament. Under the proposed revisions, developers of large housing schemes would be required to commit the funding of supporting infrastructure – GP surgeries, schools and so on – 'up front', as a planning condition. Too often, he asserted, developers currently wriggle out of such commitments by claiming they will result in higher, ie less affordable, prices for new homes.

In answering a question from a 27-year-old meeting attendee Bim acknowledged that housing issues offered particular challenges in a town like Harpenden, especially for young people trying to get on the housing ladder. Because it was such a desirable place to live, prices were correspondingly high. He emphasised the need not only to build more homes in the town, but to ensure a property 'mix' to include more affordable apartments and smaller houses.

He also suggested, perhaps controversially, that young people of necessarily limited means, some of whom might have grown up in Harpenden, could consider looking for less expensive first homes in say Wheathampstead, Redbourn or Sandridge. He added that extended mortgage terms, of up to 35 years, now being offered by some lenders, was also helpful for first-time home buyers.



Luton Airport expansion was another vital topic raised by two Zoom session questioners, where Bim reasserted his opposition not only to the airport's ultimate plans to increase capacity from 18 to 32 mppa (million passengers per annum), but also to the now 'Covid-reduced' target of 19 mppa. Neil MacArthur from pressure group HarpendenSky asked for an assurance that the application, from the airport's owner Luton Borough Council, should be 'called in' by a relevant government minister, be it for transport or the environment. Bim replied that such a move faced parliamentary difficulties because it was essentially a planning issue, where the government has traditionally been disinclined to overrule local authority decisions.

Local climate-change-relevant environmental issues raised at the meeting included the risk of flooding in the area, which would be made more serious by future development on green field sites. Bim agreed that a new reservoir in the area was needed to also address the water supply requirements of a growing local population.

On the issue of Covid restrictions and local measures to protect the population, he took the opportunity to say that health secretary Matt Hancock had written him a letter which singled out Harpenden for special commendation in the effectiveness of its vaccination organising, praising the Harpenden Trust in particular for its work of stewarding.

Sports Centre opens its doors

In line with Harpenden shops resuming near-normal business on April 12, the town's impressive new Sports Centre – after a three-month Covid-forced delay – opened its doors for the first time, giving swimmers in particular their experience of the centre's splendid facilities.



The Sports centre's spacious café, named 'Monty's' after the catering manager's late beloved dog



The all-new learners' pool, complete with poolside 'viewing gallery'



After major refurbishment the main swimming pool building now features large windows looking out on to Rothamsted Park

Gardening pleasure with less 'commitment'

At a time when we are being exhorted to 'stay at home', for the sake of our own and other people's health and wellbeing, any opportunity to get out safely into nature's crowd-free fresh air has to be welcomed. Those in Harpenden with their own gardens are therefore particularly fortunate, especially where they can also enjoy the 'horticultural therapy' of growing flowers and/or cultivating their own vegetables.

Those with little or no garden space at home, but whose green fingers itch for the satisfaction of digging, hoeing and raking, ahead of sowing or planting, have the chance of becoming allotment holders. Harpenden is well endowed with allotment plots, adding to the town's enviably extensive public green spaces; and the town's allotment clubs and associations continue to thrive.

But what of anyone wanting to enjoy the pleasures of gardening but perhaps through shortage of available time or perhaps advancing age, feel unable to take on the necessarily serious commitment of an allotment? The answer is to become a member of 'Plot 31', a local community gardening group established two years ago. Though its name has its origins in an allotment plot in Coldharbour Lane, it now occupies – and cultivates – an area in the centre of East Harpenden Gardening Club's large Holcroft Road allotment site at Batford. It comprises four erstwhile regular allotment plots.



Louise Dillon (left) and Helen Yates, the green-fingered 'masterminds' behind the Plot 31 project.

As Plot 31's joint organisers Louise Dillon and Helen Yates explain, its ethos is a simple one: to allow its members (membership is free) to come along and undertake whatever work needs doing, though with complete flexibility by way of

their involvement. The key aim, says Louise, is to give them the same kind of pleasure they would have in tending their own domestic gardens. At the same time the site is deliberately tended with the commendable 'organic aim' of helping sustain bird and insect life on and around the wider Holcroft Road allotment area.

Plot 31 activity is necessarily seasonal, but a broad aim has been established of growing 50:50 flowers and vegetables. During the Spring and Summer a variety of flowers are grown in what the group describes as 'a fledgling community flower farm growing seasonal blooms and foliage' which, under the banner of 'Flowers from the Farm', can be bought at local markets or ordered from Plot 31 for home delivery. At the end of the Summer the group will be supplying a consignment of dried flowers as part of a fund-raising exercise for Macmillan Cancer Support.



Different vegetables are grown, not only for members' own consumption – often sharing each others' efforts – but for donation to St Albans district food banks. As part of an effort to instil a 'cottage garden' feel, part of the plot has been set aside for planting fruit trees, with pears, damsons and plums among the chosen varieties.

The Harpenden Trust has been notably supportive of the Plot 31 project, providing funds for a gazebo offering periodic shelter from the elements for the gardening volunteers. And in what might be seen as a reciprocal gesture the group planted bulbs in the grass area around the Trust Hall in Southdown Road.

Meanwhile a secure tool shed for the group's use has been paid for by St Albans District Council, many of the tools, for communal use, having been donated typically by members' friends who have reined back their more strenuous gardening activities.

Society welcomes new Vice-Chairman

Jeff Phillips has joined the committee of the Harpenden Society as vice-chairman. A Harpenden resident for some 35 years and a Society member for over 15 years, Jeff brings a wealth of experience in local and broader community affairs, with a particular focus on health and education.

Since 2011 he has been deputy chairman and non-executive director of Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust, where he has more recently been appointed chairman of its People, Performance and Finance committee, while also overseeing children's services, estates and security. In his HCNT role he has this year been involved with implementing the local Covid vaccination programme.

Jeff has also, since 2007, been a governor of Manland Primary School, and a member of Herts County Council's Education Appeals panel. He is also an active member of Davenport House surgery patient group and, on a somewhat broader front, a past member of the Worldwide Fund for Nature's global audit committee.



Nothing compares to shopping the High Street...open again from April 12

The High Street in Harpenden is a lot more than where you do your shopping. It's a focal point for the whole community in a setting that's the envy of most Towns across the country. With the fantastic new Sports Centre now open and the new Arts Centre/ Theatre due to open early Summer in the beautiful Rothamsted Park, we are privileged to have so much to enjoy.

Despite a number of business closures there are many new ones stepping up to keep the High Street looking vibrant. Looks are one thing though, businesses need a significant increase in turnover to make up for lost ground during the Lockdown. They need us all to go out and spend some serious money across all the sectors in Town.

That's where the HIGH STREET SHOPPING GUIDE helps by reminding residents what's on offer.

A Message from our Mayor

This past year has been a difficult one for our local businesses, who have had to face so many challenges during the pandemic.



I am therefore delighted to see our Town open for business again and really heartened to see so many of our local retailers, restaurants and cafes welcome customers once more.

I am always conscious of how fortunate Harpenden is to have such a wide variety of places to shop, eat or relax in, particularly the many independent businesses in the Town providing their own unique blend of products and services; it makes Harpenden a great place to live, work in or visit.

I would like to encourage everyone to join me in helping to support our Town's businesses by visiting our shops, cafes and restaurants to pick up our essentials, seek out those special gifts, pick up a coffee or bite to eat or browse for the latest fashion. See you there!

With best wishes.

Cllr Mrs Nicola Linacre
Town Mayor of Harpenden

**THE HARPENDEN HIGH STREET
OPEN FOR BUSINESS
APRIL 12**

TIME TO SPLASH THE CASH!
WITH CUSTOMER SAFETY A PRIORITY BOTH IN STORE AND ON THE STREET YOU CAN START SHOPPING, SOCIALISING, GOING TO THE NEW SPORTS CENTRE & VISITING THE HAIRDRESSERS
APRIL 12TH 2021

SEE INSIDE FOR ALL THE EXCITING DETAILS

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

oui
BOWERS PARADE,
HARPENDEN
01582 766 142
WWW.OUIHARPENDEN.CO.UK

WE ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING YOU ALL AGAIN FROM THE 12TH APRIL. A WARM WELCOME AWAITS YOU

OUR SUMMER COLLECTIONS IN STORE NOW

PLEASE SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL INDEPENDENTS ON THE HIGH STREET.

WE'RE SO EXCITED TO BE REOPENING OUR DOORS (WITH SOCIAL DISTANCING MEASURES IN PLACE, OF COURSE) ON 12TH APRIL! OUR MV TEAM HAVE MISSED YOU, AND CAN'T WAIT TO SHOW YOU OUR LATEST COLLECTIONS IN PERSON. THE 1-TO-1 STYLING AND FIT ADVICE IS BACK, HELPING YOU EASE OUT OF LOCKDOWN-LOUNGEWEAR AND INTO 'REAL' CLOTHES AGAIN.

MINT VELVET
17 High St, Harpenden AL5 2RU
01582 460200

COPPERS
BOOTS & SHOES
OUR NEW LOOK
OPEN FROM
APRIL 14

24-26 HIGH ST,
HARPENDEN
07981 029330

WE HAVE USED THE CLOSURE TO FRESHEN THE LOOK OF COPPERS, CHOOSING EXCITING NEW CONTEMPORARY SELECTIONS FOR THE SUMMER AHEAD, AS WELL AS INTRODUCING ETHICAL, SAFE ELEMENTS EVEN INCLUDING A VEGAN RANGE OF SHOES.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO BEING OF SERVICE TO YOU SOON.

HEALTH HELP ON THE HIGH STREET

OUR LOCAL PHARMACIES ARE AN EASY WAY TO SPEAK TO A HEALTH PROFESSIONAL ABOUT YOUR NON-COVID SYMPTOMS. THEY CAN HELP WITH MINOR HEALTH CONCERNS AND MANAGING MINOR ILLNESSES, AND YOU DON'T NEED AN APPOINTMENT

JUST CALL IN:
SPRINGFIELD PHARMACY
MANOR PHARMACY
TOPKINS PHARMACY
BOOTS

COMING SOON TO THE HIGH STREET

HOSPITALITY BUSINESSES
THE PUDDING STOP - NEXT TO MARS
TAHINI RESTAURANT - EXPANDING INTO NEXT DOOR
VINSANTO WINE BAR - 26 STATION RD
NONNO'S PIZZA - IN MARCA'S
OAKHAM AT HOME - IN MARCA'S
A NEW LOOK FOR SILVER PALATE RESTAURANT
A NEW LOOK FOR CAFE AROMA IN SOUTHDOWN

ESTATE AGENT
WHITKATERS ESTATE AGENCY - LEYTON GREEN

DON'T FORGET THE SOUTHDOWN SHOPS

SAFE SHOPPING ON THE HIGH STREET

FACE COVERINGS ARE MANDATORY
IN ENCLOSED PUBLIC SPACES INCLUDING SHOPS, SUPERMARKETS, INDOOR SHOPPING CENTRES, TRANSPORT HUBS, BANKS AND POST OFFICES.

THEY MUST ALSO BE WORN WHEN BUYING TAKEAWAY FOOD AND DRINK, ALTHOUGH THEY CAN BE REMOVED IN A SEATING AREA.

FACE MASKS MANDATORY

FACE COVERINGS ARE ALSO MANDATORY FOR SHOP STAFF

USE THE SANITISERS WHEN YOU ENTER AND LEAVE THE SHOPS

Hand Sanitising Stations in areas of high footfall

Let's keep staying safe
Always remember hands, face, space and fresh air.
For information visit [gov.uk/coronavirus](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus)

THINK LOCAL! - SUPPORTING NOT JUST OUR LOCAL RETAILERS BUT THE TOWN'S CIVIC SOCIETY.
WHY NOT JOIN, FROM JUST £5 A YEAR, THE HARPENDEN SOCIETY
WWW.HARPENDENSOCIETY.ORG

Produced by Harpendia.com it brings together all aspects of our thriving High Street in a single point and even includes a reminder to join the Society. Read it on the Harpendia web site:
www.harpendia.com OR
https://issuu.com/exxy/docs/harpenden_high_street_shopping_guide_april_2021

Funding on the way to beat Nickey Line mud

The 'Friends of the Nickey Line' conservation group has been awarded a grant of £1000 by Herts County Council to help maintain the Nickey Line walking and cycling route. It is intended primarily as a contribution to hard surfacing the stretch from Roundwood Halt westwards, which the winter's unusually wet weather has turned into a morass in many places.

Group chairman David Abernethy says special thanks are due to HCC leader David Williams for his and the county council's continued support for the Nickey Line as a much-valued amenity for the people of Harpenden. It enables them to enjoy the flora and fauna of the local countryside as they walk or cycle with their families and/or their dogs along what was, from 1877 until 1979, the route of the original Harpenden to Hemel Hempstead Railway. Regular passenger services on the line however ceased in 1947.

Mr Abernethy says discussions are being held with St Albans District Council on the best way to improve the surface over this heavily used part of the route, especially as far as the 'five ways' footpath intersection. The Nickey Line east of Roundwood Halt was successfully resurfaced about five years ago and a similar treatment is clearly required for what has through the winter been readily negotiable only by those wearing wellingtons.



AGM and meetings

At a Society committee meeting in mid-March the question of forward planning of our meetings and other activities in the coming months, against the background of Covid lockdown uncertainty, was addressed. In normal times our AGM is traditionally held in April, but the view was put forward strongly that, if at all possible, it should be held in conjunction with a 'live' public meeting rather than as a Zoom-based online event.

Accordingly, it was agreed that the AGM should be deferred to the Autumn when hopefully many of the current restrictions on public events will have been lifted. The Society is therefore planning to hold a series of public meetings and events (at venues yet to be determined) in the Autumn of 2021 and into the Spring of 2022, starting with the AGM in September. It is hoped the April date of the AGM should be restored next year.

If members wish to feed in any suggestions for meeting speakers and subjects please do so by contacting the society secretary at secretary@harpendensociety.org.

***Future Society
Public Meetings?
Environment.
Climate Change.
Parking.
The Local Plan.
Health Services.
What would you like?***

Luton Airport – Another View

By Harpenden Society member Tony Burgess

People in Harpenden should be reminded of the positive aspects of the airport and the positive impact that the proposed expansion will bring to the area. I spend a lot of time outside in Harpenden, much of it on the golf course. And, as someone with good hearing, I seldom have any cause for concern over aircraft noise. I often ask my golf-playing partners if they are bothered and the response is always no. I believe that the same twenty noise complainants make up 95% of the complaints made.

In my view the airport provides a superb and necessary service to Harpenden residents and many other people from the UK and abroad. It has given a lot of prosperity to Harpenden and is a significant contributor towards ensuring that we retain an excellent rail service.

Another positive in the expansion proposals will be a reduction in the number of road tankers delivering jet fuel to the airport, thanks to the planned spur pipeline feeding a new fuel storage facility.

Progress has always brought objectors. It is interesting to speculate the reaction of 19th Century anti-development groups (equivalent to LADACAN) when the Midland Railway was proposed, going through Harpenden town centre with noisy and polluting steam engines!

Many people, especially the young, are hoping for employment linked to the airport, acknowledging the prosperity it will continue to provide to Harpenden and the surrounding area.

I should add that I am retired and I do not have any involvement with Luton Airport or the aviation business but I am very appreciative of its existence. I do fly from there and also from other London airports.

In anticipation of significant future Luton Airport growth before Covid-19 struck in Spring last year, the Marriott Hotels group submitted planning application to Luton Borough Council for the construction of an eight-storey 171-bedroom airport hotel incorporating a fitness centre and a rooftop bar.

VIEWPOINT: from Harpenden's Younger Generation.

We are expanding our coverage of all that matters in Harpenden, so we asked the Senior Schools for their thoughts...with more to come in the Summer.

Rejecting the 'Lost Generation' label

By Isobel Davenport, School Captain at St George's
The media appears to have coined the phrase the 'Lost Generation' to define the prospects of Generation Z (those born between the mid- to late-1990s and the early 2010s) given the disrupting coronavirus pandemic. And, had I not studied *The Great Gatsby* for my English Literature A Level, I may well have overlooked or even accepted the term. Perhaps this is a rightful depiction of young adults in the midst of national pessimism, I told myself.

However, when researching the historical context which influenced F Scott Fitzgerald's writing, I learned that this is not an innovative phrase conjured up by a natty 21st century columnist. Rather, it was used to define the prospects of young adults who survived the First World War, a phrase attempting to capture the purposeless debauchery of the 'Roaring Twenties' which emerged following this international disaster.

Of course, we should not ignore the statistics telling us that, for example, school closures over the past year are expected to cost every child, on average, £40,000 in lifetime earnings. But it is both unfair and inaccurate to compare us, by way of purposelessness, on the basis of material disadvantage. We are an emotionally resilient generation, young people who truly appreciate the importance of community and selflessness.

This is particularly the case for the youth of Harpenden who have, for example, witnessed the remarkable work of Harpenden Cares, a community-led initiative highlighting the issues of social isolation and encouraging volunteering among all age groups. We are the generation who, despite the pandemic, have had the strength and passion to stand up against racial injustice and fight for mental health recognition, drawing attention to the ever-growing climate crisis and hold politicians accountable for their actions. So, my plea is that the media and we ourselves think again before accepting this label – we are not lost, but have more purpose than ever.

Isabel Davenport,
18, a life-long
Harpenden
resident, is School
Captain at St
George's, where she
is studying English
literature and
aspires to a law
degree.



Maintaining community spirit in wake of Covid

By Hope Kneller, Year 13, Roundwood Park School If the pandemic has taught me anything over the past year, it is the importance of community. In a time where society has been forced apart, we have forged new ways to come together and appreciate each other at the most basic level; by giving without expecting to receive. At Roundwood Park, we have striven to maintain community spirit by inspiring hope in all those hit by or made vulnerable by the pandemic.

What began with simple lockdown challenges to raise money for school charities grew into a whole school initiative to give back to the world around us through the summer and into the new school year. It is such times when we, as students are reminded of the difference we can make, and the platform that our school gives us to provoke change. From helping local families by collecting and dropping off donations to foodbanks, to putting together 'warrior packs' for cancer sufferers, so many have been involved with helping wherever they can.

A group of students, including the chamber choir led by teacher Annie Dale, paid visits to care homes around Harpenden in the days before Christmas, with care packages and singing carols to remind those not able to see loved ones that they were not alone. At the other end of the spectrum, the arrival of Spring has seen the student leadership group organise an Easter Egg hunt for schoolchildren in the local area as a reminder of new beginnings.

Now, more than twelve months since the beginning of lockdown, it is all too easy to look back on the last year as a wasted one. But, if nothing else, it has served to bring us back to the little things we take for granted. To show what part the students play in making up the community of Harpenden, perpetuating ideas about altruism into the future.



Hope Kneller, 18 and a
House Captain at Roundwood
Park School, where she is
studying English, History and
Music at A Level. Hope will
next year begin an Open
University Degree in English
Literature and creative
writing, whilst working on her
dream of being accepted into
drama school to becoming an
actress.



Roundwood students and teachers
with Christmas care packages



Appeal against care home plan rejection

Harpenden-based developer Jarvis Commercial Ltd and its business associate Porthaven No 3 Ltd have lodged an appeal with the Secretary of State against St Albans District Council's 2019 refusal to allow the building of a three-storey care home on the site in Coldharbour Lane currently occupied by Chelford Fabrics. On a point of information the site, which presently includes a large open parking area partly used by a car wash business, happens to be immediately adjacent to Jarvis group's Waterside head office.

In its refusal SADC said that 'by reason of the site's location within a designated Employment Area, the change of use of the land to a C2 residential care home would result in the loss of a high-quality designated employment site and the potential to use the site for employment purposes in the future.

The council asserted that the plans ran contrary to the St Albans Local Plan (in its last ratified 1994 iteration) as well as the Harpenden Neighbourhood Plan and the aims of the National Planning Policy Framework 2019. It was considered that the proposal would potentially have an

adverse impact on the living conditions and amenities of residents of the proposed care home. Furthermore, by reason of the 'cramped layout and lack of landscaping' on the site, the plans lacked 'quality outdoor amenity space' for those future occupiers.

Meanwhile insufficient information had been provided by Jarvis and Porthaven to ensure adequate capacity of mains services (water, sewage, electricity, gas and broadband) to accommodate the proposed development.



Disabled parking issues

The 'Editor's View' column about Covid parking restrictions in our Winter newsletter prompted a number of responses. One in particular, from a disabled Harpenden Society member, highlighted the problems which continue to be faced by Blue Badge holders. The lady in question who is wheelchair bound relies on her husband, who is himself elderly with heart problems, to push her around when they go shopping.

When the revised restrictions in Lower High Street were first implemented, designated spaces for the disabled outside Boots were blocked off, though she says that following an exchange of emails with Herts County Council (responsible for Highways) and the town council the 'Blue Badge spaces' were thankfully reinstated.

But she has expressed understandable annoyance at their 'abuse' by non-disabled parkers making her and her husband upset and angry and who, when challenged, tell her 'they're only going to be a minute'. Not wanting to park dangerously on junctions or double yellow lines herself, she rightly makes a plea to those thoughtless shopping parkers for greater consideration.

Another society member expressed a different perspective on the town centre parking issue, emphasising that the restrictions are in place to allow pedestrians more space because of Covid transmission risks and that until the

vaccination programme has made good progress, nothing is more important than protecting residents from infection. A wider point the member makes is that our town will prosper if shopping is regarded as a pleasant experience, adding that unfortunately Harpenden has a reputation for drivers of large 4x4s 'who sweep around expecting everyone to jump out of their way', so that it's currently more relaxing than in 'normal' times, being able to walk along the busier side of the High Street and feel that risk is diminished, so let's not presume parking out trumps all other considerations.

What do you think about the Lower High Street pedestrianisation – and inevitably inter-related parking – issues? For instance, post lockdown, should the stretch between Station Road and Vaughan Road be closed to traffic altogether? Send your views, however lengthy or short, to editor@harpendensociety.org and we'll air them in the Summer newsletter.



Disabled parking bays in Lower High Street presently inaccessible

Are you environmentally minded?

Climate Change...Clean Air...Recycling PLUS issues like Flora and Fauna on the Harpenden Common? Why not share your passion and join the team as the Environment Committee Member of The Harpenden Society.

Are you passionate about Sport?

Football...Rugby...Cricket...Bowls... for all ages. Why not share your experience and join the team as the Sports Committee Member of The Harpenden Society.

You will be involved in a range of activities bringing these issue to the attention of the Harpenden community and all our members.

Your help could make a real difference to life in Harpenden.

Interested? Please contact our Membership Secretary, Hester Gabbutt.
membership@harpendensociety.org

Did You Know? From Harpenden's history St George's School

It was back in 1907 that St George's School was founded by the Rev Cecil Grant, although the buildings were already 20 years old, having been built by another man of the cloth, the Rev R H Wix, as a boarding school for a hundred boys. The Chapel had been added in 1891, and the swimming pool in 1894 – thought of at the time as a frighteningly fashionable development. (The swimming pool was converted into an air-raid shelter during the Second World War.)

Having relocated his school southwards from its origins at Keswick in the Lake District, Grant and his wife set about establishing a new school for his pupils – predominantly boarders – which centred around 'community and the Christian faith'. They established close relations with whole families, some of whom had moved south with the Grants and with children as young as three or four enrolled at the school. Through an issue of shares Grant was able, in 1910, to purchase the freehold for a sum of £14,000.

Some of the school's original buildings remain in use, notably the chapel and Keswick boarding house. Grant brought with him families from the Lake District, those which would become the bedrock of the well-reputed communal atmosphere which the school still strives to retain. Grant's tenure as headmaster saw both progression and despair, as St. George's grew rapidly. As a co-educational boarding school, St George's was unusual in the early 20th Century, and attracted an eclectic mix of characters and minds which served only to enhance the school's charm.

However, after seven years of growth and development, the ethos of Grant's school was brought crashing down by the impending war in Europe. The Great War of 1914-1918 claimed the lives of nineteen Old Georgians serving in the British Army, many of whom had held prestigious positions in society thanks in large part due to their well-regarded education. These fallen former pupils still resonate with the school today, with two of the school's houses, 'Monk' and 'Goddard', being named after tragic war casualties.



St George's School c.1910

A prominent alumnus of St Georges was Kenneth Horne, known on the BBC for comedy shows such as 'Much Binding in the Marsh' and 'Round the Horne' in the 1940s and 1950's. Following the premature death of his father in 1914 he became, aged seven, a boarder at the school.

Befitting the strength of character instilled in the school's alumni, Grant led St George's through a resurgent period, with numbers swelling and new buildings being added throughout the 1920s and 30s. In 1936, after almost 30 years at the helm, Grant retired, handing over the reins of headmaster to Dr A H Watts, who proved to match the tenacity and industry of his predecessor. In particular he developed the school's reputation on the sports field and in the local community especially during the difficult period of the Second World War.

The post-war era of the 1950s and 60s saw the most extreme additions to the buildings on St George's site, in line with the school's transition in 1967 from a private school to a voluntary-aided state comprehensive. From its humble beginnings the school has become a hugely successful institution of learning. Currently educating over 1300 pupils it remains one of the highest achieving state schools in the country, whether in terms of exam results or on the playing field, buoyed by its emphasis on faith, community and a desire to learn.

Acknowledgement: the website of Harpenden Local History Society

Trust praised for its vaccination role

Plaudits are due to the Harpenden Trust for its major role in the organisation of the Covid vaccination programme centred on the Public Halls. Its role of stewarding those arriving for their 'jab', to ensure their safety, in respect of social distancing and escorting people to their allocated places in the large hall and afterwards for their statutory 15 minutes cautionary wait, was widely praised. Harpenden's MP Bim Afolami was among those paying tribute to the Trust in its work of calling for volunteers.

Over 700 willing local residents came forward, says Trust chairman Richard Nichols, though unsurprisingly not everyone could be involved. A rota was established covering four daily time slots (8.30 to 11.00, 11.00 to 1.30, 1.30 to 4.00 and 4.00 to 6.30) with 15 volunteers at each time, six days per week. That amounted to 360 positions on the rota, with approximately 300 volunteers covering all these times (as some kindly volunteered to do more than one slot per week). By March 10 some 9570 people, predominantly older citizens of the town, had been vaccinated.



EDITOR'S VIEW

Alan Bunting

We'll meet again – but where?

News that our new Sports Centre is to be pressed into service as a polling station for May's local council election is a reminder of how well endowed Harpenden is now for venues, whether for organisation meetings, entertainment events or one-off civic requirements. In that last category one must include the vital role of the town's venerable Public Halls in the last couple of months as the town's Covid vaccination centre.

Though the Public Halls' days are numbered, as the new Culture Hub and Eric Morecambe theatre adjacent to the Sports Centre in Rothamsted Park nears completion, they will be remembered in particular by many people for the pantomimes, gang shows and drama productions, as well as exhibitions staged within their now over 80-year-old 'hallowed' walls.



New Sports Centre to double as Polling Station

Park ownership transfer brings SADC council tax cut

At a St Albans District Council 'full' meeting in late February, council leader Chris White had a small amount of good economic news for Harpenden. He said that despite SADC facing a £1.7 million shortfall – set to increase even further next year – and a scheduled 2.75% increase in council tax charged by SADC for most parts of the district, Harpenden homeowners would qualify for a 1.16% reduction. It related, he explained, to the planned (and long delayed) transfer of ownership of Rothamsted Park to Harpenden Town Council.

However, the amount of total council tax payable in the town for the 2021/22 year, including that levied by Herts County Council, Harpenden Town Council is increased by some 4.3%. Occupants of social housing in the town face a 1.5% rent increase.

At the same meeting Cllr White also confirmed – as foreshadowed in our Winter newsletter – the scrapping of the council's much-criticised plan to purchase, for some £18 million, the block of commercial property (shops and flats referred to as 'the Harpenden Estate') on the west side of Harpenden High Street.



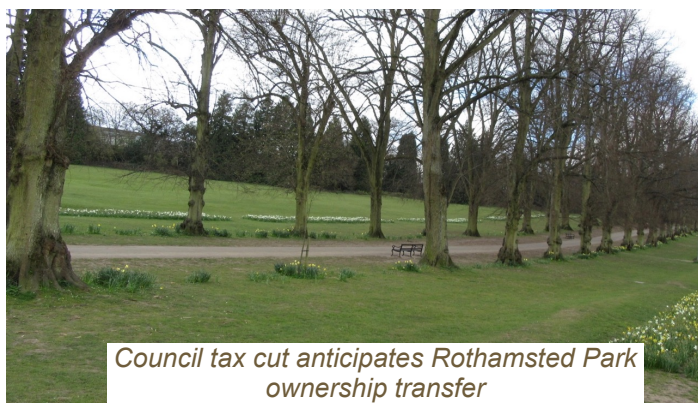
In recent years the Fowden Hall at Rothamsted Research's conference centre has proved a valuable and suitably prestigious venue, notably for Harpenden Society public meetings where large attendances were expected. Its only downside is its relatively high cost for hiring, at least for a civic society of limited means.

There is now however rather more competition for meeting venues which ought, in theory at least, to help keep down event budget overheads. Examples are the opening of the Salvation Army's splendidly rebuilt centre behind Leyton Green and the greatly extended and refurbished meeting rooms at Bennet's, the Royal British Legion headquarters.

Alas, before all those new and existing venues – which must also of course include the town council's Park Hall and the Harpenden Trust Centre at Southdown, not forgetting the various church halls available for hire – can realise their potential, Covid restrictions on social distancing and on numbers attending indoor gatherings will have to be lifted. And, at the time of writing, that regrettably looks unlikely before the Autumn.

Any likelihood of the acquisition by SADC being revived in the future has, in any case, been somewhat overtaken by events, namely the sale of the 1.1 acre Harpenden Estate by Columbia Threadneedle Investments (a global asset management group of Ameriprise Financial, Inc, a leading US-based financial services provider) to central London based Pears Property for a reported £15 million.

He expressed a hope that, under ongoing Covid-restricted conditions, the council would receive more financial support from central government, leading to an eventual easing of those restrictions, to start restoring the council's finances to normal.



Council tax cut anticipates Rothamsted Park ownership transfer

Please send comments on articles or any other issues raised in this edition to the editor: Alan Bunting

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Designed by Ron Taylor

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