



The Harpenden Society and Council Leader set out their visions



‘Our Vision for Harpenden’ was the theme of the Harpenden Society’s April meeting, following its routine AGM proceedings. Chairman Chris Marsden said that, despite recent distractions, notably those related to St Albans District Council’s Strategic Local Plan, the Society was looking forward optimistically in its role as a non-party political ‘ginger group’, building on its achievements over the past year. Those included its part in helping establish the Volunteer for Harpenden (VfH) grouping of local, essentially philanthropic organisations, and crucially setting up the valuable VfH website.

Society members should be reminded, said the chairman, that there were numerous positive developments in the pipeline for Harpenden, promising visual and practical enhancements for the town. Plans were now set fair for the bold redevelopment – after some 15 years of dereliction – of the former James Marshall House site and the adjacent Seniors Club, bordering Rothamsted Park to the rear of the Town Hall. (See separate article, page 3.)

Though the Harpenden Society welcomed the final go-ahead from the planning authorities for what is now entitled the Park House development, there was a need for a holistic approach, involving a review of the nearby leisure and sports facilities in Rothamsted Park, to ensure that the new Park House buildings and immediate surroundings blended harmoniously into the area. That would, ideally, include moving the

presently rather distant children’s play area closer to the sports centre.

As a further element in the Society’s ‘Vision for Harpenden’, Chris Marsden also looked forward to the redevelopment of the Harpenden Memorial Hospital ‘Red House’ site as a modern Health & Wellbeing Centre. (See page 8)

Admittedly a more distant, though exciting, prospect was the potential redevelopment of Harpenden Public Halls which, as they stood, were regarded by the people of the town rather like Marmite – loved and hated in roughly equal measure. There was the exciting possibility of creating a proper theatre on the site, along with an arts hub and a museum able to do justice to the extensive archives and vigorous ongoing work of the Local History Society.

Funding for such a project was a key question however. It was therefore likely that such a theatre and arts facility would have to form part of a larger development which would include some housing, most obviously apartments above the communal areas, for private sale or rent.

Editorial continues on next page

About the Newsletter

Members might notice that this issue of the quarterly newsletter has, for the first time, been expanded to eight pages – a reflection of the Society’s increasing activity and involvement in local issues. Let us know of any matters affecting Harpenden which merit coverage in future issues, at editor@harpendensociety.org

Council leader's vision

Julian Daly, (below) planning portfolio holder and leader of St Albans District Council (SADC), accepted the Harpenden Society's invitation to provide his own perspective on the Vision for Harpenden theme at the April meeting.



He began by acknowledging the town's parking problems which, he said, had certainly worsened in the last year. A second deck on the east station car park had been considered, though planning considerations and the need for co-operation with Network Rail presented complications which had yet to be overcome. Likewise the matter of funding; the likely cost had been estimated at between £10,000 and £14,000 per car space.

As to the mooted upgrading of the sports centre, swimming pool and indeed the Public Halls, Cllr Daly emphasised the requirement, at a time of ongoing

stringency in public finances, for such developments to be 'cost neutral' ie largely self-funding.

He cited the example of the successful and completed redevelopment of the Westminster Lodge sports complex on the Verulam Park site in St Albans. Better use needed to be made of the existing space at Harpenden swimming pool. A larger main pool was envisaged plus a second 'flexible use' pool.

On the Public Halls redevelopment issue, Cllr Daly said he envisaged a 500-seat theatre to replace the current 400-seat Eric Morecambe hall. It could form part of a multi-function facility incorporating a sports hall, arts hub and a Harpenden museum. A question yet to be addressed however, and one which SADC planners would regard as vital, was the issue of available car parking on or near the new facility. An early cost estimate was around £17 million, which was a formidable sum, set against the annual £2 million or so coming from Harpenden's council tax payers. It was nevertheless hoped that support funding could be obtained by way of grants from national bodies such as the Arts Council and Sport England. The proposals, however tentative and ambitious, were, he insisted credible and he cited the Westminster Lodge and City Museum in St Albans as recent examples of what was possible.

Cllr Daly said he was 'reasonably confident' that his vision and that of The Harpenden Society could be realised, though he cautioned that redevelopment schemes should be kept as simple as practicality would allow. 'Complications inevitably lead to things going wrong', he added.

'Without Whom' presentations

In recognition of their energetic work behind the scenes at the Harpenden Society, 'Without Whom' presentations were made by president Alison Steer at the AGM to two long-serving and stalwart members of the committee. They were Bob Fletcher, (below left) the society's hard-working secretary for the past four years, who crucially also manages the website so ably, and Eric Midwinter, (below centre) retiring after five years as editor of the society's newsletter and as its

watchdog on education and leisure issues. Following those presentations, treasurer Harry Downie (below right) provided a summary of the society's finances, which were pronounced to be essentially healthy, thanks to a growing membership – now approaching the one thousand mark.



Welcome to Park House



These are the good times.

This graphic is from the web site of Park House. Click on the link for ongoing information or whenever you want an update.
www.parkhouseharpenden.co.uk



After a total of six previously unsuccessful planning applications PegasusLife has received the go-ahead to build a five storey apartment complex on the site of the long-derelict James Marshall House and those adjacent buildings which latterly served as Harpenden's Seniors Club. It will comprise 35 two-bedroom and three one-bed apartments with a management company run on a not for profit basis. **Construction work is scheduled to begin in July of this year, with completion expected in December 2017.**

At the Harpenden Society's April meeting, PegasusLife manager Emma Webster put the plans into context. Situated on the edge of Rothamsted Park, Park House, as it will be called, will overlook the park, close to the Sports Centre and Swimming Pool. However, an unobstructed view across the park for residents will require the controversial removal of four large conifer trees inside the park boundary, permission for which has yet to be granted.

Tim Riley, from RCKa Architects – and a Society member – then gave a more detailed presentation of the plans. He said it was necessary, for aesthetic as well as planning consent reasons, for the development, comprising three separate apartment buildings, to blend with the nearby Town Hall and

Busy Bees nursery building, with the intention of enhancing the Leyton Road townscape. Accordingly the RCKa team had pursued what he called an 'arts and crafts' architectural theme.

At the same time it also needed to be, as far as possible, practically and visually attractive for those enjoying their leisure activities in Rothamsted Park, to which end Park House will also include a café open to the public as well as a 76 square metre communal Seniors Club lounge area for the use of its elderly and/or disabled residents.

Artist's impressions of the future Park House show outdoor café tables on a south-facing terrace, fringed by an attractive pergola. There will be pedestrian access to the public areas from the north along Hay Lane.

Inside the three apartment blocks – connected on the slightly sloping site by a covered shallow-ramped colonnade – a novel 'open plan' layout has been adopted which does away with traditional corridors to give a more spacious ambience. In keeping with today's inevitable personal transport needs, each Park House apartment will have its own assigned car parking space.



The Harpenden Society Awards for 2015

At its April meeting the Society's annual Awards were announced by Penny Ayres, leader of the Awards committee. Their aim each year is to recognise projects which enhance the local area and which are of architectural merit or of historic or other interest, or which contribute visually or socially to the locality.

After much thought and discussion, she said, it was decided to award the prestigious Harpenden Society Plaque for 2015 to the recently-completed Glen Eagle Manor development: two apartment buildings on the site of the former Glen Eagle Hotel. They were considered to have been built and finished to a very high standard by the developer, Harpenden-based Jarvis Homes.

The Awards committee considered the development was worthy of particular commendation for the notably compatible rebuilding of the fine stone wall along its Luton Road boundary, in order to widen the previously sometimes hazardous narrow footpath. The Harpenden Society chairman Chris Marsden presented the plaque to Jarvis Homes CEO Mike Peters outside the Glen Eagle (top right) with Penny Ayres and Mike Waddilove (Build & Environment committee member)

A Letter of Commendation went to High Beeches School for two beautiful stained glass windows, designed and made by school pupils under the direction of Helen Robinson, a local artist. Jo Drake, chair of the school governors accepted the award.

A Certificate of Merit was presented to Ruth Martin, chair of the governing body of the Harpenden Academy free school in Vaughan Road, in particular recognition of the sympathetic way the development has returned much of the 120-year-old village school building fronting Victoria Road to its original educational use.

A second Letter of Commendation was awarded to Sainsbury's for the murals displayed on the outside of the supermarket, for their graphic style and historic local theme. This was presented to James Merrett, the Sainsbury's store manager by Chris Marsden with Penny Ayres in attendance.



Road and rail transport challenges aired at Forum

As yet there are no early solutions in sight for Harpenden's intractable car parking problems. That became evident at the Transport Forum meeting in March hosted by county councillors David Williams and Teresa Heritage, where parking loomed large as a key issue for the town.

Cllr Williams said that resurrection of an earlier tentative scheme – rejected on aesthetic grounds by SADC planners – to construct an elevated second deck above the east car park at Harpenden Station, which would effectively double its capacity, had hit a new stumbling block. It was essentially a funding issue, involving Network Rail and Govia Thameslink. Meanwhile, proposals for new restrictions on street parking, notably in the 'Avenues' area, had been put on hold. It had been recognised that many early-morning 'street parkers' in that part of the town were not commuters heading for the station, but modestly-paid Harpenden retailer employees, for whom car parking charges could be punitive.



Rail travel from Harpenden was also reviewed at the March Forum. Larry Heyman of Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) spelled out changes in the pipeline for passengers travelling from Harpenden Station. Following evidently successful trials by Transport for London, it was proposed to reduce the times outside rush hours when the ticket office was manned, though not until improved machines and electronic 'contactless' ticketing were available.

On Monday to Friday mornings it would be open from 6.00 to 10.30; outside those hours, from 5.00 through to 23.00, one or more free-ranging station 'hosts' would be on duty, on the platforms or concourse. Their role would be to issue tickets and, in addition, to help passengers use the automatic ticket machines and to provide rail travel information. On Saturdays the ticket office would be manned from 6.15 to 19.15 and with hosts on duty from 6.00 to 23.00; on Sundays those hours would be 7.15 to 20.15 and 7.00 to 23.00 respectively.



Mr Heyman apologised for current shortcomings in the Govia Thameslink service, attributable in large part to the major works in progress at London Bridge Station, which would continue until the Thameslink through service from Bedford to Brighton was restored in 2018. Route diversions and speed limits south of Blackfriars also caused delays. A new local hail-and-ride bus service, operating under the name Harpenden Hopper is due to begin operations in September. It will enable the elderly and those without cars living on the outskirts of the town to get to the shops, as well as for example to doctors' surgeries, more readily. Venture partners Andy Buchanan and Simon George outlined their plans at the Transport Forum.



They have two 17-seat minibuses being liveried in distinctive green colours. Six or seven volunteer drivers were also 'raring to go', said Mr Buchanan, adding that the necessary licensing and insurance formalities required for a public bus service were determining the progress of the plans.

Some public funding for the service was expected though it is hoped to augment that with sponsorship from local businesses, necessarily motivated by a degree of self-interest in generating custom from users of the service. A flat fare of £2 was proposed, though with senior citizen bus passes accepted. Timetables and route details had yet to be finalised, but a two-hourly service, from 9.30 to 16.30 was envisaged, probably following one or more figure-of-eight routes, extending out to areas such as Roundwood which were presently poorly served by mainstream bus services.



It was acknowledged by the county councillors chairing the Forum that the condition of Harpenden's roads left a lot to be desired. Cllr Williams (above) reminded those present that remedial work to potholes and streelights was dependent on members of the public reporting such faults, which could be done on the Herts County Council website. He added that inefficient road sweeping was frequently caused by the obstruction of parked cars.

Did You Know?

From Harpenden's history



Hidden behind the shops of Bowers Parade in the High Street, fronting the pleasant green space which now houses the Sensory Garden for the enjoyment of the visually impaired, and which was originally the site of the Cock Pond, lurks a much older building: Bowers House. (below)

Parts of it date from a 16th Century timber building, which was subsequently extended and altered over the following 400 years, hence its wonderful seemingly-random 'roofscape'.



The earliest recorded occupant was Richard Bardolph, brother of Edmund Bardolf of Rothamsted, who lived at Bowers in 1597. Later residents included curates attached to St Nicholas church. In 1650 it was acquired – for the princely sum of £360 – by Sir John Wittewronge, ancestor of Sir John Lawes, the pioneering agricultural researcher of Rothamsted. Fast forward to 1935 when plans by local builder H E Webster to build a parade of shops in what was the Bowers House front garden were fought vigorously by the nascent Harpenden Society, but alas to no avail, though any thoughts of demolishing the historic house behind were thankfully quashed.

Acknowledgement: the website of Harpenden Local History Society

WANTED New Chairman

Like Lewis Carroll's 'Hunting of the Snark', the Harpenden Society's quest to find a new chairperson is proving elusive. Chris Marsden, who became chairman in 2011, promised to do three years, has soldiered on a further two, and has declared his intention to relinquish the role in April 2017.

Where is a worthy successor to be found? Searching under gooseberry bushes can probably be ruled out. Direct appeals to members at recent Society meetings has, to date, yielded a negligible – nay, non-existent – response.

A more indirect approach would perhaps be more fruitful. Among esteemed Society newsletter readers there must be individuals who bridle at the thought of taking on the role of Chair themselves, but who could bring to mind one or more potential candidates. Personable and reasonably gregarious are two desirable qualities for what is a worthwhile, satisfying and sometimes busy job as the recognisable 'face' of the Society, liaising with outside organisations, notably local authorities, residents' associations, Proburs clubs and the like.

Why not whisper a name in the ear of a Society officer or committee member, or drop a surreptitious email to chairman@harpendensociety.org. Then a quiet approach might be made, an elbow felt, an ear murmured into – all part of the process of what has been called 'volunteering by stealth'.

Chris Marsden has unquestionably done a wonderful job as Chairman for five years, bringing vigour, decisiveness and a wide-ranging imagination to bear, that has resulted in the Society broadening the base of its involvement in the life of Harpenden, raising its profile and influence substantially. Accordingly, in keeping with the variety stage mantra, 'always follow a good act'; an audience already primed to enjoy itself is likely to be more receptive to the following 'turn'.

Please contact
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EDITOR'S VIEW

Litter curse – schools' vital role

A recent article in the Herts Advertiser, highlighting the curse of litter in and around St Albans, echoes the same concerns of many Harpenden residents. It was pointed out that although organised 'litter picking' is to be commended, the real focus should be on deterring people from dropping their rubbish in the first place.

It is hard to fathom the mentality of those who discard their fast food containers, drinks cans, cigarette packets, tissues and plastic bags in the street. Would they perhaps be content to live in the middle of a waste landfill site, oblivious to their nauseous surroundings?

My own observations in Harpenden indicate that a high proportion of the litter we see all around us is dropped by youngsters on their way to or from school. It seems to me that care for the environment should be included in the much-vaunted National Curriculum. Litter is, after all, another form of pollution, deserving of attention, and indeed legislation, in the same way as noxious vehicle exhaust emissions. By all means let's get schoolkids organised on litter picking – which they



won't enjoy, but with an important accompanying message that the job wouldn't be necessary if they took their own litter home or disposed of it tidily.

Anyone from the UK visiting Germany, Austria or the Scandinavian countries cannot help noticing their almost entirely litter-free townscape and countryside, which local inhabitants take for granted. It would never occur to them to drop their detritus willy-nilly on the ground or throw rubbish from their car windows.

I fully support the suggestion that it is time for the Keep Britain Tidy campaign – which was launched back in 1954 – to be revitalised, possibly by way of posters around the St Albans District, including Harpenden, and that such a campaign should, crucially, involve active participation of local schools.

Alan Bunting

Green Belt – a clarification

In the Spring issue of The Harpenden Society News we reported on the society's well-attended February meeting at Rothamsted's Fowden Hall where St Albans District Council's Strategic Local Plan (SLP) was debated. One of the keynote speakers was Joanne Wicks QC, who has asked for it to be pointed out that it is a national planning policy requirement, rather than a local independent council-commissioned report recommendation, that Green Belt boundaries should be kept where they are unless there are 'exceptional circumstances'.

Ms Wicks says that although, in her presentation, she was critical of the council's failure to prepare an up-to-date assessment of available non-Green Belt land, the evidence does not suggest that the council could get anywhere close to building 8720 new homes without taking land out of the Green Belt.

She adds that the council is not obliged to release Green Belt to meet 100% of its housing 'need'. In that respect she took issue with Cllr Teresa Heritage who had said, at the same Harpenden Society meeting, that she had been advised that the council had no choice but to meet its housing 'need' in full.

A glimpse of Harpenden in a dystopian future where accumulated litter has become part of the landscape.



New Membership Secretary

The Harpenden Society's new Membership Secretary Jan Smith was born in Yorkshire, though she married John, 'a mere Southerner', and moved to Harpenden with two young children in 1977. She was a volunteer librarian at Crabtree Infants' School for 11 years.

She and John took an active part in the Roundwood Park School team that fought to keep Sir John Lawes School open when the powers-that-be wanted to sell the land for housing. She taught English as a second language for two years before becoming a full-time teacher for 10 years at Crabtree School, and later a teacher/governor.

Jan, John and their youngest daughter later moved to Munich, where she made several close friends, both ex-pats and local German 'natives' and became active in the International Methodist Church and the International Women's Club.

Jan wrote a book about living and working in Munich, which ran to three editions and became the editor of a property magazine, recorded language-learning CDs and taught English to local children, students and business people.

After 15 years away Jan and John returned to Harpenden, where they became immersed in numerous activities, including Friends of Alzey the Computer Friendly group.

The Harpenden Society becomes for Jan a new and happy commitment.



'Red House' redevelopment on course for April 2019 opening

As indicated in the Spring issue of Harpenden Society News, the Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust (HCT) board has approved the 'Strategic Outline' proposals for the Harpenden Memorial Hospital site to be developed as a 'Health and Wellbeing Campus'. The plans, spelled out in some detail by David Law, chief executive of Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust (HCT), at a packed meeting of the Harpenden Society in late February, are ambitious.

He emphasised that new buildings were just part of the outline plans for the proposed facility in Carlton Road, while adding that, because of its age and functional unsuitability, the venerable and historic Red House building itself could not be part of the projected development.

The intention was, said Mr Law, that it would be sold, together with other 'surplus land' on the site in order to generate much of the funding required to set up the new Health and Wellbeing centre. He stressed however that none of the surplus land would be sold for housing development, though a care home for the elderly was a distinct possibility.

Outline approval had been given by the HCT board for the scheme to go ahead, though he cautioned that an administratively lengthy process lay ahead before building work could begin. Planning consent had to be obtained from St Albans District Council and a 'preferred bidder' selected from contending development companies.

Nevertheless a target date of April 2019 had been set for the opening of the new facility. Answering a question from the audience as to how confident he was that the timescale target would be met, Mr Law said that, as someone with a 'half full' rather than a 'half empty' disposition, he put his confidence level on the projected timescale at 90%.

A wide range of illness-prevention as well as direct health services would be available at the centre, notably advisory services intended to help residents of Harpenden maintain a healthy lifestyle, in turn helping reduce pressure on already-stretched local hospitals. One important aim of the project was, said Mr Law, to maintain the present affection felt by many in Harpenden for the Red House, so that they would feel the new health centre, in the same way, 'belonged to the town'. There would accordingly be an emphasis on a local 'rapid response' to people's health-related needs when they arose.

Because we were all living longer than ever before – the number of those over 85 expecting to increase by 50% by 2025 – there was, in Mr Law's words, 'a rising tide of people needing treatment for long-term conditions'. He cited ever improving cancer survival rates as well as increasing numbers of elderly diabetes, dementia and arthritis sufferers.

Specific medical services confirmed for the new centre – which, at the time of writing, has yet to be given an official name – include (for adults): treatment for diabetes, heart disease, Parkinson's and leg ulcers, as well as bladder and bowel care and retinal (optical) screening. Current well-used Red House services, notably the blood clinic and podiatry (chiropody) and

ophthalmology departments, would continue at the new facility.

Provision would be made for a range of children's – especially baby and post-natal, as well as speech therapy – services. The centre would also be a base for paediatric health visitors.

There was also potential, said Mr Law, for the centre to provide a physiotherapy service, and some diagnostics currently undertaken only by hospitals. A consultancy for adult as well as child and adolescent mental health problems was also a possibility, supported by provision of cognitive therapies. Those latter services might also be linked to a Citizens Advice Bureau presence at the centre.

A large multi-purpose 'community space' was also envisaged, said Mr Law, available in the evening as well as during the day, for keep-fit sessions, including weight management, yoga, pilates and other health-promoting activities. It was intended that the centre's management would cater for participation by the voluntary sector, whose multi-faceted activities were brought together earlier this year under the 'Volunteer for Harpenden' banner.

Mr Law concluded his presentation with a reference to a pilot scheme undertaken in Watford whose aim was to overcome the often 'disjointed' medical and health-promoting services provided by different bodies, namely hospitals, clinics, GP surgeries, and social care workers employed by Hertfordshire County Council. He said he hoped the new healthcare centre on the Red House site would play its part in blending those different services together for the population of Harpenden.



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

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Visit the Society's website –

www.harpendsociety.org

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