

## ‘Interesting times ahead for our community!’

**Says Harpenden Society chairman Jeff Phillips**



As we now know, St Albans District Council (SADC) submitted its statutorily-demanded 2025-2041 **Local Plan** to the Government just before Christmas, and two planning inspectors have been appointed whose role is to examine the plan in all its detail to ensure that it meets the statutorily-demanded requirements for it to be formally approved.

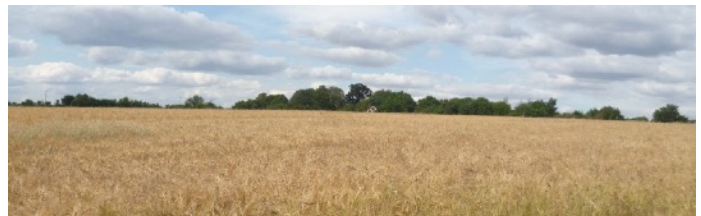
Haven't we been here before? Many will ask that question, to which the answer is yes, more than once. Previous draft Plans have alas been rejected by government inspectors for different reasons, most notably SADC's failure to co-operate with neighbouring local authorities, especially Dacorum, on the issue of housing development sites.

The **Harpenden Society** recognises the need for an updated Local Plan to replace the one which, astonishingly, has been in place since 1994, in order to define sites for additional homes. We are particularly supportive of the council's aims, set out in the new draft Plan, to protect as much of Harpenden's precious Green Belt as is practical, whilst meeting construction targets, focussing not just on housing numbers but, vitally, on supporting infrastructure – schools, medical services, transport issues and, of course, essential mains services.

However, it has now been widely publicised that a number of developers have already lodged applications for sizeable housing projects across the St Albans district in order to take advantage of the legislative hiatus created by repeated delays in getting governmental Local Plan approval. And, unsurprisingly, Harpenden has not escaped their interest.

Two of those major proposals being put forward for housing development on Green Belt

agricultural land, with planning applications either submitted or expected, are from Legal & General (L&G) at Cooters End (below) and, more recently



proposed, Crest Nicholson at Batford, between them projecting in excess of 1000 dwellings. (Below) Those projects alone represent some 70% of the total housing build of around 1500 homes foreseen over the 16 years of the Local Plan's intended tenure.



Apart from the government's declared – albeit controversial – numerical house-building targets, we acknowledge the pent-up demand for more new homes locally as well as nationally. However, there needs to be a substantial commitment to provide homes that are genuinely affordable to buy as well as much needed social housing to ensure a vibrant community – a commitment which is commendably addressed in SADC's detailed Local Plan preparation document.

*Article continues overleaf.*

Whatever housing projects get approved, the community has to be sure that it is capable of coping with the population impact. It is therefore essential that Harpenden Town Council, Herts County Council (especially Highways and Education), local NHS providers, Thames Water Regulator etc, are fully engaged with SADC to ensure that major developments do not get progressed without a guarantee of adequate infrastructure resources ahead of formal planning approval.

To date, those two major would-be developers – L&G and CN – have done little to address the formidable infrastructure challenges they face, other than in the most general or superficial terms. For example, L&G have attempted to address the issue of additional traffic on the already congested A1081 at the Nickey Line bridge ‘pinch point’ by a wholly unrealistic and indeed counterproductive proposal for traffic light controlled one-way working.



A ‘preview’ of what such an outlandish scheme would mean – as a necessarily permanent measure – is clear from the recently-started gas main renewal work by Cadent on either side of the bridge, which has resulted in north and southbound rush hour traffic backed up for half a mile or more.

Parking, in or close to the centre of Harpenden, remains another critical issue and one which would become even more challenging should its inevitably car-owning population be significantly increased through either or both the L&G and CN housing developments getting the go-ahead. More off-street parking capacity is obviously needed. But alas SADC’s imminent parking restriction plans presage the very opposite by way of practical town centre car parking provision.

On a broader canvas Harpenden and its townspeople face other equally challenging issues, notably the now increased threat from Government of a near 70% expansion of Luton

Airport, inflicting additional noise and other local environmental pressures, by way of air quality and, of course, increased road traffic within a wide radius of the airport.

Harpenden Society members should rest assured that, on behalf of the community, we will maintain our engagement with all the stakeholders and decision makers in what we hope is a positive and realistic approach to the many, sometimes daunting, issues that confront us.



On a more upbeat note, the Society is already looking forward to the launch of our prestigious ‘**AWARDS 2024**’ focussing on praiseworthy local developments completed during last year, following on from the successful ‘AWARDS 2023’ (see page 8 ).

Members will remember how we featured some of the exciting new developments in the world of agriculture, with a talk last year from Rothamsted Research’s James Clarke BA.

This year we are getting closer to local farming with an editorial from local farmer Stuart Roberts

who will explain the complexities of modern farming here in Harpenden. (see page 7)



AND we have extended the copy deadline for the joint Harpenden Society/Harpenden Photographic Society photographic competition to April 1st which we hope will encourage more entries (see page 10).





# Local Plan 2025–2041 third time lucky?

## Council leader hopeful of its adoption this time

As long ago as 2014 this newsletter was reporting St Albans District Council's preparation of what, at the time, was termed its updated '**Strategic Local Plan**', setting out legislative guidelines, for future housing and other building development, across the district. It was deemed to be an urgent issue, the existing Plan not having been updated over the previous twenty years, that is since 1994.

But as most **Harpenden Society** members will be aware, during what has now been more than a decade, there have been two abortive attempts by SADC to formulate a new **Local Plan** (evidently no longer regarded as 'strategic'). Both efforts were rejected as being unacceptable to government demands in meeting national housing policy, with this newsletter striving to record all the whys and wherefores, particularly in relation to the implications for Harpenden.

A third attempt at gaining government approval for the council's necessarily revised planning strategy is now at an advanced stage, as SADC council leader Paul de Kort (who represents Harpenden East and is also a Herts County Councillor) explained when he addressed a well-attended Harpenden Society public meeting, held

at Katherine Warington School lecture theatre in late January.

He pointed out that much has changed of relevance to planning issues, in the local as well as the national domain in recent years, not least across the political landscape. SADC has come under Liberal Democrat rather than Conservative control and, more recently, Labour has come into power at Westminster.



Under new Secretary of State for Housing, Angela Rayner, the Labour government has formulated a revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which has set revised new 'top down' housing targets to be met before the next general election. Those targets call for an 88% increase in the number of new homes to be built annually in St Albans District, compared with the target set by the Tory government. However, SADC's updated Local Plan was deemed to be sufficiently close to submission to government inspectors, the previous mandatory target of 885 new dwellings per annum

was allowed to stand. Councillors are optimistic that the scrutiny process by inspectors and hence subsequent approval will be more rapid than with previous Local Plan submissions. And Cllr de Kort said its adoption by March 2026 was 'a reasonable forecast'. *Article continues overleaf*



Focusing specifically on Harpenden housing issues, he said the total number of new homes projected in potential planning applications had already been whittled down from about 1600 to 1340. The reduction was accounted for by an early deletion of four relatively small proposed schemes, viz: 95 homes at Cross Lane, rejected for Herts CC-determined road access reasons; 43 homes at Beesonend, blocked pending completion of a study by the government's **Natural England** advisory body; 55 homes on Rothamsted estate land re-designated for 'employment' (ie commercial) use; and 70 homes on the Piggottshill Lane sewage works site, where the landowner Thames Water had withdrawn its development proposal.

In assessing the priority of planning applications, explained Cllr de Kort, the legislators assign a 'weight' rating, based on the level and urgency of housing need. For SADC, which has a current 'housing supply' rate of 1.7 years, this level was deemed to be 'dire'. Harpenden MP Victoria Collins, in company with her St Albans counterpart Daisy Cooper, are accordingly pressing for a quick and maximum 'weight' examination of the LP submission by the inspectors.

It had to be acknowledged however that, based on past experience with large scale developments involving multiple and complex infrastructure and related issues, like those pending from L&G and Crest Nicholson on precious Green Belt land, the process could take up to three months. The inspectors were likely, he said, to be asking SADC planning officers – and by implication councillors – many searching questions, with much toing and froing of exchanges.

Those questions would be likely to include the crucial matter of infrastructure funding, at a time of public sector budget constraints. To put that in perspective Cllr de Kort said it was estimated that the costs for infrastructure, including highways, associated with the two big housing schemes proposed on the outskirts of Harpenden was likely to come to around £750 million.

Also there would be the inevitable and vital issue of new home 'affordability', where some significant negotiation – with input from the developers – on the percentage of new homes to be categorised as 'affordable' (always deliberately in quotes in this newsletter) for buying, or for rent as social housing, can be expected.

## The Local Plan. Harpenden Society's view

### The community needs

1. A plan for more housing, especially small and medium size family homes
2. Affordable housing for the long term
3. To secure the Green Belt for the future.
4. A commitment to deliver the infrastructure needed before development starts, especially
  - a. Road traffic improvements around Batford and the A1081
  - b. Improved drainage and sewage systems
  - c. Primary and secondary school provision for the enlarged community
  - d. Community assets, retail/office space, recreation facilities for Batford
  - e. Improved health service provision
  - f. A parking strategy for the town to cope with the increase in demand

## Final Thoughts from Paul de Kort

Large volume home building across the District  
will occur

It is much better that this be planned than  
unplanned.

There is a trade-off between more housing  
provision and the impact on current residents.

This impact needs to be mitigated as much as  
possible by approving the most sustainable, well  
resourced sites, available.

## Next Stages from Paul de Kort

Jan '25: inspector begins  
studying and written questioning of  
contents

April - June '25: Start of public  
examination sessions

By 3/26???: Local Plan approved.



# Huge Batford expansion mooted

## Erosion of Green Belt would make way for 750 new homes



Concern about large scale housing development plans threatening the Green Belt around Harpenden have focussed for a decade or more on the 36 acres of farmland adjacent to the A1081 to the north of Bloomfield Road. That threat remains live, with the land owners Legal & General now pushing harder than ever to obtain planning approval to build around 300 or as many as 500 homes on the site.

But the more recently mooted, and even bigger, 'north-east Harpenden' housing scheme – on 108 acres of Green Belt agricultural land adjacent to what has long been referred to locally as Batford council estate, and identified as B2 on the nascent St Albans District Council Local Plan – is now also being actively promoted as the site for around 750 new dwellings.

The would-be primary developer is **Crest Nicholson** (CN), a major house building group based in Weybridge, Surrey. (For the record, in June 2024 Crest Nicholson reported a pre-tax loss of £30.9 million in the half year to April 2024 on turnover of £257.5 million.)

CN wants to build up to 490 two-to-five bed homes on two-thirds of the site, of which 40% would be 'affordable' (for rent or shared ownership), as well as a 60-to-80 bed care home. . But three smaller developers: Miller Homes, ME

Simons Trust and Sauncey View Lodge, have also put forward plans for the site.

Outline (ie preliminary) planning application by CN is due to be submitted to St Albans District Council this Spring with a full (ie detailed) application scheduled for submission between 16 and 20 weeks later.

Positive features of the scheme highlighted in CN's masterplan include: a two-form entry primary school; a so-called 'local centre'



(comprising shops and a GP surgery); a (vaguely defined) 'on-site sports provision'; and (equally non specific) 'improvements to transport infrastructure'. The company also pledges to maintain over 50% of the site as 'open space', including sports pitches and play areas.



*The Crest Nicholson site is bounded by Lower Luton Road (bottom left), Bowers Heath Lane (top left) and Common Lane (top right).*



Unsurprisingly, the plans have come up against substantial local resistance, not least from the active Batford Community Action Group (BCAG), whose objections – largely supported by the **Harpenden Society**, who acknowledge the need for more housing locally – have been submitted via SADC’s formal planning consultation process.

Referencing the government’s National Planning Policy Framework, which commends significant extensions to existing villages and towns **only if they are well located and supported by the necessary infrastructure and facilities**, the BCAG asserts that the proposed location is not such a site. Outside of the main settlement (ie Harpenden) boundary, it has poor connectivity with the town centre. Harpenden Station is up to 2 miles away and there are no safe designated cycle routes. Residents would therefore be almost totally car reliant. It can be added that bus services between the north-eastern part of Batford and central Harpenden are sparse and not always reliable.

In response Crest Nicholson has pledged to undertake a ‘strategic transport assessment’ which would address issues already put forward by local consultation responders. Those include

additional traffic congestion on Lower Luton Road.

Also prominent in local objectors’ submitted comments was the apparent lack of concrete assurance re: the stated provision of infrastructure, and the funding of same at a time of extreme financial constraints on local authority and public utility budgets. And where, it was quite reasonably asked, would doctors and supporting medical staff for a new GP surgery be found from a fully-stretched NHS?

The extent of the Crest Nicholson-headed scheme’s Green Belt encroachment is also being questioned, in relation to the 2019 Harpenden Neighbourhood Plan’s assertion that several hundred new dwellings could be accommodated on ‘brownfield’ (ie non Green Belt) sites within the existing town boundary, and at a density compliant with the HNP’s desirable minimum of 100 dwellings per acre.

Full details of the proposed Crest Nicholson plans can be seen at:

**250103 HE Presentation 07 Jan 2025 Final.pptx**



# I often ask myself what a farmer is?

As is often the case the simplest of questions to ask can be rather difficult to answer. *By Local farmer Stuart Roberts*

On a cold freezing January morning I think I am pleased to be sat inside a warm farm office. The office is probably the place most farmers like the least. Unfortunately, as each generation of farmers take on the baton from the previous generation the office seems to become more and more important.



However, it is in the fields that we are most at home. It is in these fields I am stopped the most and asked what we are doing, what we are growing, how do we care for the farm and often how long have we been doing it for. In my case, here at Hammonds End, I usually answer by saying I am the third generation of my family to farm this land with my grandfather first appearing in Hertfordshire not long after the Second World War. In many ways this is a long time but in terms of the Harpenden Farming Legacy it is a mere blink of an eye in comparison to some families such as the Dickinson's at Cross Farm who stretch back centuries.

The intergenerational nature of farming here or anywhere else in the country often means we look at ourselves in a very different way to other sectors of the economy. We are indeed businesses, and it is right that we see ourselves that way, but we are in many ways no more than temporary custodians of a piece of land hoping and trying to leave that piece of earth in a better condition than it was when we first inherited it.

I often ask myself what a farmer is? As is often the case the simplest of questions to ask can be rather difficult to answer. The question is incredibly relevant now. As the world becomes less secure and the challenges, we all face become greater I find the role and requirements

of farming are changing faster than at any point in my lifetime. Too often we simply draw an equation which articulates a farmer's role as a food producer. This is a consistent role that farmers have played since the dawn of time. However, farming today is far more complex than that. I look at the approximately 300 acres of land at Hammonds End and look how we use it today in comparison to years ago. Today we are using our part of Harpenden to produce food, produce energy, store water and improve the quality of water, increase biodiversity, store and capture carbon, encourage access for the wider wellbeing of our community. For too long we have allowed farming to be simplified into the production of producing calories.



Today's fields around Harpenden are producing so much more than just simple foodstuffs and the farmers who have been part of our community since the town first existed are continuing the role they have always had which is to produce what the community needs from them. I suspect what my grandchildren will be producing will be different from me but for as long as we value the family farm the next generation will continue to look after the land in a way that seeks to do more inside the field boundary than you would normally think by driving or walking by.



# Nominate your favourite 2024 Building or Development for a Harpenden Society Annual Award



**Two winners from 2023 to give you inspiration for 2024.  
The prestigious Plaque for the Station Approach apartments AND a Certificate of Merit for the All Weather Pitch in Rothamsted Park.**



## HOW TO NOMINATE YOUR FAVOURITES FOR 2024

**Look around Harpenden and see what was built or developed to completion by the end of 2024. OPEN TO ALL HARPENDEN RESIDENTS.**

**The closing date is April 18th 2025**

There should be some merit in what has happened with real benefits to the Town and the local community, whether they be a large number of residents or a smaller active group. So NOT just an attractive looking building BUT something more significant.

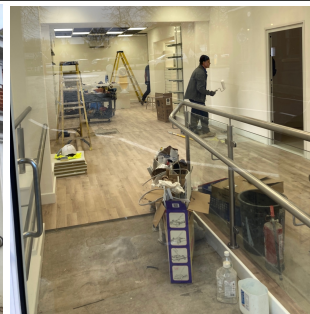
**FULL DETAILS ON THE WEB SITE:**

**[www.harpendensociety.org](http://www.harpendensociety.org)**





National businesses are filling many of Harpenden's empty shop units. By all accounts retail businesses are facing a difficult 2025 following the Autumn Statement. Thankfully our High Street is almost fully occupied as can be seen with the Brands featured inc a new Dentist on Leyton Rd opposite Waitrose.



Above left. Manor Pharmacy opening in the old HSBC unit in Spring. Exterior and interior views. Right. Mandarin Stone now open at end of M&S block



Above left. Cotswold Furniture opening in the ground floor of the old Barclays unit in Spring. Right. Travelbag. A new Travel Agency now open in Leyton Rd opp Waitrose.

## The controversial parking charges in Harpenden town centre are due to start from Feb 17.

Imposed by St Albans Council they are still the subject of opposition by local businesses, residents, Harpenden Town Council and the Harpenden Society.

You can keep track of this volatile situation via the Society web site. [www.harpendensociety.org](http://www.harpendensociety.org)

# **HARPENDEN SOCIETY AND HARPENDEN PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY 2025/2024 PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION**



## **What makes Harpenden the No.1 most desirable town?**

Harpenden has been named as Britain's 'most desirable town' according to a study commissioned by The Telegraph with real estate agent Savills. Based on its transport links, green surroundings, good schools, leisure facilities, retail and hospitality offerings plus a wide range of quality of housing.

Show us what you can do with your photographic skills and win great prizes in the PHOTO HARPENDEN competition organised jointly by the Harpenden Society and Harpenden Photographic Society .

We want your images that make Harpenden the "most desirable town".

## **Who can enter**

It is open to all Harpenden residents in two categories- Under 18 years and over 18 years, including members of the sponsoring organisations. NB. Professional photographers are not allowed.

## **What to photograph**

Images of the key aspects of Harpenden that make it a desirable place to you. You can enter up to three images to reflect your views.

## **How to supply your photographs**

All images to be submitted in jpeg format with the phrase "Photography competition entry" as the title and sent to:  
[socialmedia@harpendensociety.org](mailto:socialmedia@harpendensociety.org)

## **Prizes**

Finalists and Winners will be announced via email by no later than May 1st 2025. Prizes of Gift Vouchers will be awarded to each age group: 1st £125; 2nd £100; 3rd £75; 4th £50; 5th £25. Additionally. Each winner will receive a year's free membership of the Harpenden Photographic Society and a year free membership of the Harpenden Society.

## **Closing date. 1st April 2025**

## **Terms & Conditions**

To download the Terms & Conditions go to  
[www.harpendensociety.org](http://www.harpendensociety.org)





# Mental health in focus at Harpenden Society meeting

Many families in the Harpenden area enjoy a standard of living noticeably higher than the national average. But whether that relative local domestic prosperity brings with it, in the 21st Century, a corresponding level of family-wide harmony and contentment is more open to question. For today's young people especially, the worries that in days of yore centred around poverty or even hunger, have been replaced by quite different concerns which in their own way are arguably just as threatening.

Those concerns afflicting the younger generation, as well as their families, schools and other youth organisations, are incapsulated in what has come to be termed their mental health, whose manifold issues were addressed at the Harpenden Society's Autumn Public Meeting by Dr Alison Cowan, a Hertfordshire GP specialising in young people's mental wellbeing.

She holds regular twice-weekly youth-focussed surgeries and holds the post of medical officer for a community eating disorder (anorexia, bulimia etc) service. She pointed out to her audience, in the lecture hall at Katherine Warrington School that, of passing relevance, she was the mother of three adolescent daughters.

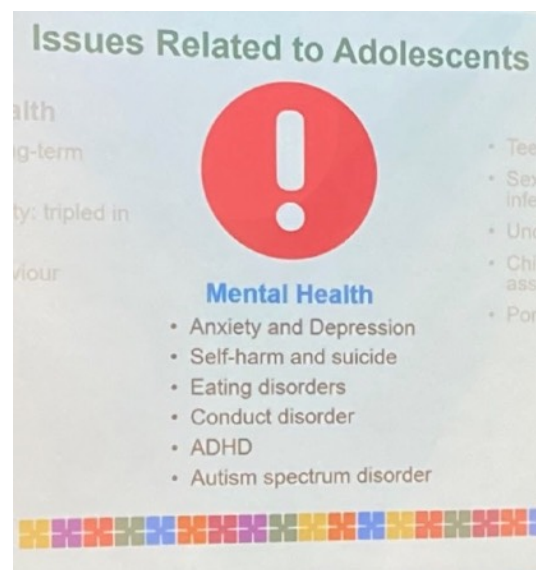
In order to define her terms of reference Dr Cowan said it had become useful to categorise 'adolescence' as the ages from 10 to 20 and 'young people' in the extended 10 to 24 age group, the latter numbering some 11.7 million in the UK, or roughly one in five of the population.

Studies in recent years had indicated, she said, that 50% of mental illness was initiated before the age of 14 and 75% before the age of 24. In 2021 it was widely asserted that one in six of 11- to 16-year-olds and one in five of 17 to 22 year-olds were 'probably' subject to mental disorder of some



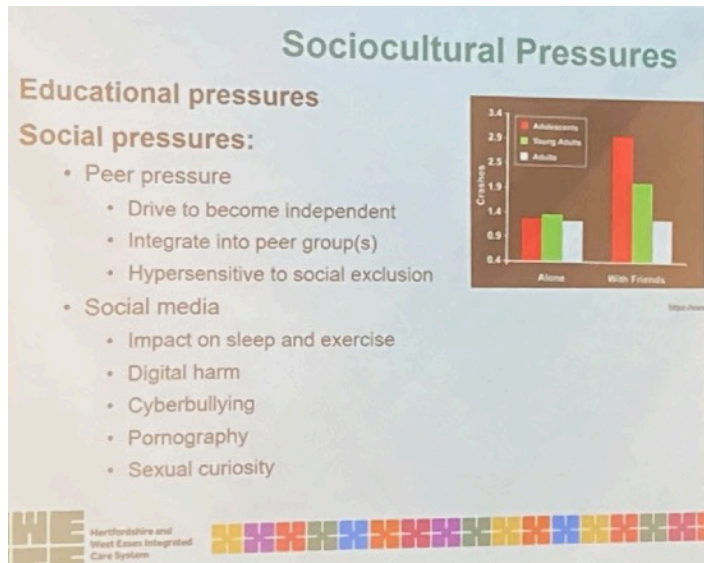
kind, young women more than men being especially vulnerable.

Among the key issues were anxiety and depression (often sleep loss aggravated), in extreme cases leading to self-harm and thoughts of – or actual – suicide. Eating disorders, often related to an individual's perceived body image, were further manifestations, as well as behavioural disorders and ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder). All of those factors contributed to the likelihood of young people being drawn to the physical risks associated with drugs, alcohol, smoking and unguarded sex.



*Article continues overleaf*

As well as the biological, neurological and therefore psychological changes happening through adolescence, there was now a greater influence than ever before on what Dr Cowan categorised as 'sociocultural pressures', notably within peer groups.



Under the heading of 'social changes', she said young people's sense of belonging to and within a (home based) family had declined, to be supplanted by conformity to, and establishment of intimate relationships within, a peer group. Though conferring a welcomed feeling of 'independence and autonomy', it opened the contrasting possibility of 'hypersensitivity to social exclusion', with potentially damaging or even tragic mental health consequences.

Dr Cowan then broached the often controversial but clearly vital subject of young people's increased access to, and relationship with, the internet and social media, especially over the last decade. She highlighted such consequent resulting issues as the detrimental impact on sleep and exercise, 'cyberbullying' and pornography.

As a first step in dealing with a young person's mental health challenges, she said it was important to listen 'non judgmentally' and to acknowledge their distress, while endeavouring to explain their reactions to 'trigger' events, while seeking to analyse causes, particularly of anxiety.

Though anxiety was a normal human response to stress or fear, it could become a pernicious problem when it was prolonged or occurred too often, to trigger a self-perpetuating vicious cycle. Research had shown, she said, that such a vicious cycle of an anxiety-driven low mood usually needed to be addressed through a changed way of thinking by a young person about how they feel, implying the need for outside help.

Dr Cowan rounded off her presentation slide show with a listing of the many local and national organisations now in place which young people and/or their families and loved ones can turn to for help and guidance on issues directly or indirectly related to mental health. Those included numerous relevant websites and social media apps as well as perhaps more traditional telephone helplines, grouped under the heading of 'Crisis Support'.



*Dr Alison Cowan is introduced by Harpenden Society health representative Ian Barrison.*

Please send comments on articles or any other issues raised in this edition to Editor Emeritus: Alan Bunting  
[editor@harpendensociety.org](mailto:editor@harpendensociety.org).  
 Sub-editor Harry Downie  
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