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Over Recent Years there has been a trend in the Harpenden Society to set up small groups or working parties to study specific matters of local concern, with such professional or expert guidance as may be given by suitably qualified members. This has begun to bear fruit in that the Society is properly briefed, through them, to offer authoritative and responsible opinion or advice which may be of value to the authorities or to the community generally.

The Harpenden Urban Design Group (which consists of architects, engineers, town planners and members of kindred professions, whose homes are in Harpenden but who practice further afield) was one such group which the Society called into being. It is now an independent body which the Society consults, or confers with, as occasion demands.

The following list summarises the groups already in existence and suggests some others which might be formed:

1. PLANS SUB-COMMITTEE: summoned into existence some years ago as a result of what seemed, at times, regrettable planning decisions, this group is the Society's planning watchdog. Its members scrutinise the official list of planning applications submitted to the local authority for approval each month. The group's chairman, together with a representative of the Urban Design Group, meets with the Council's Surveyor a few days before each meeting of the Council's Plans Committee for an informal briefing: they examine any questionable applications in detail, look at the plans, and the group then submits its views in writing; these are taken into consideration by the Plans committee when working through the applications.
2. HARPENDEN COMMON: consisting of Harpenden Society and Urban Design Group representatives, this group has already commented on U.D.C. proposals for limiting parking to specific areas of the common.

It might be considered that the time has now come for it to extend its brief to include a critical appraisal of the present uses to which the Common is put - not only parking but picknicking, ponds, natural scrub and planting, cricket, golf, fairs - and try to foresee the results of the intensification in the demand for leisure activities, for adults and children, which will come with the increases forecast for population, traffic and leisure.

The question of a corps of volunteer 'vigilantes' (as e.g. the Ashridge 'Guardians') has been raised and needs further study.

3. LEE VALLEY: Another Society/Urban Design Group studying the natural history, amenity, environmental and economic aspects of development in the river valley within the U.D.C. boundaries. It ties in with - and builds on the work of - a former Urban Design Group working party which has already submitted to the Urban District Council a feasibility study of the Eastern Region railway land which has been bought for the town by the Council, and is now gradually being implemented. The Report on the Lee valley is urgently needed in order to anticipate and warn against further inroads, by piecemeal building development, into an area of potential natural beauty and amenity which needs very careful conservation if it is to be of value to the community of Batford, housed on the slopes overlooking it.
4. TOWN CENTRE RE-DEVELOPMENT: Primarily an Urban Design Group working party, with a Harpenden Society representative, studying the future development of the Town Centre in relation to traffic, buildings, shopping, pedestrianisation, greens and trees, street furniture, and general amenity. It has met with members of the Planning staff at County Hall dealing with Harpenden's town centre, to compare notes and discuss probable developments in the Conservation Area.

The group's proposals for an interim solution of the principal traffic problems have already been presented to and discussed with the Council's

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Highways Committee and will, it is hoped, be taken further for discussion at County level.

When the H.C.C.'s traffic survey and statistics have been analysed and published it is hoped that still further discussion may take place between the group, the Council and the County on longer-term solutions.

At present the lack of integration - at every level - between traffic management and urban design remains a very real threat to the character of the town.

OTHER MATTERS IN NEED OF STUDY AND ACTION FOR WHICH GROUPS MIGHT BE FORMED

5. FOOTPATHS: Their signposting, use or disuse, maintenance and improvement: suggestions for new walk-ways or bridle paths: publicity as to their whereabouts and encouragement for the use of footpaths.
6. A MUSEUM 1) Historical Records: Documents - ecclesiastical and legal, maps, engravings, paintings, portraits, old photographs, picture postcards, letters, bill-heads, registers etc. Books - a local bibliography: Statistics - population, trades and professions, etc. Slides and colour transparencies.
2) Bygones: examples of local crafts and pursuits, models, curios.
3) The people of Harpenden: the fascinating history of the last 100 years in Harpenden - reminiscences of its personalities, customs, crafts, and now almost legendary characters - still lie in the memories and among the family possessions of old Harpenden residents. These need recording - by tape and transcript and photograph - before they are lost for ever. (This would be essentially a collection of things to see and hear and handle: a written history of Harpenden is currently being covered by Professor Lionel Munby's W.E.A. course on local history.)
7. HISTORIC BUILDINGS: those already listed: others - potential for designation: the 'Conservation Area', its implementation and planning procedure under the new legislation: analysis - descriptive, with annotated plans, and photographic records.
8. TREES AND LANDSCAPE: Tree survey: analysis of open spaces and other elements essential to landscape: proposals for planned planting or landscaping: special areas requiring detailed study, e.g. E.R.Rly.Land.
9. ROTHAMSTED PARK: A study of existing amenities - sport, swimming, general recreation and natural enjoyment: public facilities: proposals for future conservation, expansion and improvements in the light of increasing demand and national policy.
10. NATURAL HISTORY: Archeology and landscape: local flora and fauna - their habitats identified and species recorded: conservation, augmentation, colonisation etc. records by photography, tape and field study.
11. AMENITY: Litter, rubbish, skips, dumps, tips, refuse-disposal, street cleansing, pollution (noise, air, water etc.), eyesores: street furniture and the urban scene, seats, litter bins, bus shelters, lighting columns, railings, small pockets of neglected urban waste-land - negotiations for their reclamation or restoration as contributions to the general amenity of the town: work parties to do this.
12. CIVIC NEWS LETTER: A bulletin on local amenity, conservation and development: possible sponsors and contributors: a combination of Harpenden Society, Urban Design Group, Conservation Society, Herts. and Middx. Trust for Nature Conservation, et al. Editorial body to include a Press Officer to keep the local press supplied with information, news, articles on matters in which the Societies are engaged.

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