



New Horizons

A much more concise constitution, ably drafted and steered through by Vice-chairman Richard Thomas and a new President...before Professor Moloney's compelling address on GM crops (see page 6) at The Society's public meeting on 4 October, there was a brief Extraordinary General Meeting at which a new constitution was agreed and a new President was elected. Almost all of The Society's seven Working Groups are beginning to make a mark in their various sectors, with roughly thirty Members providing a second tier of advice and assistance to the Committee. The future beckons....

Our New President

Alison Steer, (below with Chairman Chris Marsden) unanimously acclaimed as The Society's incoming President at the Extraordinary General Meeting on 4 October, accepted the role in these modest and heartening terms:



Photo courtesy of Steve Gledhill

"Thank you. I am delighted to accept your nomination and become your new President. I hope I will live up to your aspirations. Ian Fulton has been an excellent President and he will certainly be a hard act to follow. My thanks go out to him for all he has done over many years for both The Harpenden Society and for Harpenden as well."

This is an exciting time for The Society, having a new Committee with plenty of vision and a real interest in Harpenden. The new Working Groups will have lots to keep them busy with the airport expansion, the Free School, provision of school places, moving of the Library, let alone the changes in planning recently announced by the Government, to mention a few. Talking of planning, I would love to see some houses and buildings in Harpenden that represent the 21st century. Having been brought up in Cambridge, I know that old and new can sit well together.

Let us all now join together and support our Harpenden Society. It is our watchdog to ensure that Harpenden stays the happy place we call our home town."

New Viewpoints

During the Queen's Jubilee and the Discovery Day events on the Common this summer, The Society stand was visited by many local residents who were asked to suggest on what they thought The Harpenden Society should be concentrating. 105 worthy citizens responded. Publicity officer Ron Taylor and Secretary Bob Fletcher (in the foreground below) have painstakingly analysed the replies and here is a brief resume of what was suggested.

- 22 called for more action on school places, perhaps coloured by the fact that on Discovery Day we shared a stand with Harpenden Parents group.
- 17 pleaded in familiar terms for easier parking around the town centre.
- 14 yearned for a more vibrant and independently orientated retail trade.
- 14 asked for more carefully controlled traffic in the town
- 12 were insistent on preserving the atmosphere and cleanliness of the locality
- 10 urged the case for much better provision for youth

There were others with views on conserving the architectural style of the town, keen to see major improvements in the local parks, anxious to see the Red House properly sustained, worried by the thought of Luton airport expansion and eager to see the arts more extensively encouraged. There was a series of useful single suggestions as well.



All this will prove invaluable to The Society as it considers its options. However, even a glance through both this and the last edition of the **Harpenden Society News** might persuade you that several of these ideas are already fixed in the mind-set of The Society's committee and some of them have been the subject of Society action.

The Harpenden in Question

being a series of editorial commentaries on important Harpenden issues that should challenge thought and encourage inquiry and action.

7. Measure for Leisure



Leisure is often seen negatively as idle non-work. Increasingly it is being accepted as an essential element in the well-rounded life. Cicero, all those years ago, put his Roman finger on it when he wrote 'the thing which is the most outstanding and chiefly to be desired by all healthy and good and well-off persons, is leisure with honour'. The statistics tell us that Harpenden has plenty of healthy and well-off persons; their goodness we shall charitably take for granted. We know, too, from the quickest glance at the several directories and notice boards about the town what a vast range of leisure pursuits is available in this community.

That is not to say that leisure provision could not be improved and the Education and Leisure Working Group of **The Harpenden Society** has started to look, for instance, at what is on offer locally from the St Albans City and District Council. What most affects Harpenden is a consequence of its neither fish nor fowl place in its local government ambit. Although half the size of St Albans proper, it is big enough to warrant on-line descriptors of the District Council being composed of 'two main urban areas', with a number of satellite villages. These twin urban areas account for close on three-quarters of the population. Until the sweeping and controversial local government reorganisation that took effect in 1974 Harpenden had, as many readers will recall, Urban District Council status.

It follows that the pick of the facilities are, with some justification, in St Albans itself. But Harpenden is a comfortably sized township with a modicum of communal facilities. Perhaps it is logical that they play second fiddle to their St Albans equivalents but second-best should not necessarily mean second-rate.

Consider the instances of the Public Halls and Rothamsted Park. Both come under the aegis of the district council, albeit with the former being leased to a management company. Both have excellent qualities. Both leave something to be desired. Both are not as good as they could be, with the growing feeling that is because they are not central to the district as a whole.

The trouble with the Public Halls is sheer dilapidation. It has the shabby air of a faded 1930s style public building. Both inside and out it needs extensive refurbishment if not replacement – and a six months closure for repairs is indeed promised for next summer. The trouble with Rothamsted Park, for all its glorious setting, is insufficiency of modern play and allied equipment and the lack of refreshment facilities, something that was highlighted in the autumn edition of **Harpenden Society News**.

In a word, neither is as well-served and cared for as its St Albans equivalent.

The Society has negotiated representation on the two user bodies associated with these amenities, the Public Halls Customer Forum and the Rothamsted Park Customer Forum. Our chosen representative on both is Ron Taylor, the Society's Publicity Officer. His vigorously optimistic and brightly energising approach has been welcomed by these committees, both of them committed to offering the public good value. The Society is also to devote its public meeting of 24 January 2013 to the generic topic of local leisure (see Memos for Members on page 3) including its call for a multi-arts complex.



The mercurial Victorian statesman Benjamin Disraeli claimed that 'increased means and increased leisure are the two civilisers of man.' Harpenden could through public, commercial, personal and charitable intent find increased means to furnish increased leisure opportunities. Certainly there is no earthly reason why our amenities should not be on a par with those of St Albans. Otherwise it leaves us – after we have digested the wisdom of Cicero and the judgement of Disraeli – singing along in more homely fashion with the old-time music hall star, Lily Morris, 'why am I always the bridesmaid and never the blushing bride?'

Eric Midwinter

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

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Memos for Members

Society Public Meetings

First of all, here is news of the two public meetings arranged for early in the new year.

Thurs 24 January LEISURE PROSPECTS

The Society's Education and Leisure Working Group has done preliminary work in a number of leisure-associated fields, notably the library, the public halls, Rothamsted Park and with its notion of a PEOPLE'S CENTRE for a broad range of creative arts.

Members of the Group will be making brief presentations about these varied yet also unifying activities and are keen to exchange views and ideas about them.

Thurs 21 February RED HOUSE REVIVIFIED

The Society's Health and Social Welfare Working Group has been to the fore in urging the case for breathing new life into the Harpenden Memorial Hospital, popularly known as the Red House, especially with its well-received paper on the subject, 'Red House Revivified'. This meeting will be devoted to bringing Society members and members of the public up to date on this very vital issue, with reports and discussions on the various meetings and surveys that have taken place.

Both meetings are at 8.0 pm, with refreshments available from 7.30 pm, and will be held in Park Hall, Leyton Road.

The date of next years Annual General Meeting and review of The Society's activities over the past year will be 11 April 2013. Make a date in your diary. More information about that in the Spring Edition of the Harpenden Society News

The Red House

The Red House issue – see our note of a public meeting on that topic next February – is certainly one that touches a nerve among the townspeople of Harpenden. The Society has received a most heartening letter from Shirley Cowell, President of the Harpenden Village Womens Institute. Shirley Cowell writes, 'on behalf of the eighty members' to support our actions; at a recent meeting she asked for a show of hands and 'received a hundred percent response from the attending members. We have in the past marched down the High Street supporting the retention of the Red House...and still feel very strongly that it should be used for the health and social welfare of this community.'

The Society is really gratified to receive this eighty-strong endorsement of its policy and promises to sustain its campaign to revitalise this much-loved Harpenden facility.

Sorting out the Sorting Office

Ron Grimshaw, having read the last edition, writes '*...I was interested to read of the forward planing of The Society but I was surprised not to see any mention of what I consider to be the most important issue that has affected Harpenden in recent times; namely, the closure of the Harpenden Sorting Office and the appalling effect it has had on delivery services in the town*'.

A fair point. The Society's Committee has discussed the topic on a couple of occasions and the intrepid Ron Taylor, our Publicity Officer and Editor of Harpendia, interviewed the Post Office manager. One has to keep reminding oneself that the Royal Mail (the postmen and women) and the Post Office (the retail counters) are two separate businesses. The Royal Mail has departed from Harpenden, but, in the case of undelivered mail, the postal worker is instructed to leave a reference card at your house and you can recover your mail from after 10.0 am the next day at the Post Office counter.

But it may be that Ron Grimshaw is more concerned with the Royal Mail aspect whereby deliveries are arriving very late in the day and the personal link between home and postman or woman appears to have vanished. Do other readers share the anxiety of Ron Grimshaw and your worried editor about this trend? Do let us know.

The Harpenden Society Awards 2012

'We live in a good place. One very important reason is the quality of the buildings and the social amenities that we enjoy. For many years The Society has tried to encourage good design by recognising good new developments. Now is the time to look out for what is best in the projects completed in 2012. A proposal form is included in this newsletter. Please give it some thought and return to me or complete it on line at our web site.' Anthony Steele, Chairman, Awards Subcommittee

Number Plate Security

We have been asked to convey to members the message that the Hertfordshire Constabulary is working with two local garages to offer drivers anti-theft number plate screws, supplied and fitted free of charge in ten minutes. Apparently the theft of number plates to use on vehicles for criminal purposes is something of a problem.

Call the garage in advance to book an appointment.
Steven Eagell Toyota,
at 37/47 Radlett Road, Frogmore, St Albans AL2 2JX
Telephone 01727 874747 or
at 9 Ascott Road, Croxley Green, Watford WD18 8AD
Telephone 01923 693333

Planes congest roads

Richard Thomas, The Society's Vice-chairman, does the car-count that would result from the expansion of Luton Airport

Did you know that Luton Airport is proposing to double its passenger numbers to 18 million a year within twelve years? That's double the present number.



Your Society has been thinking about the implications for Harpenden. Some residents of the town think that the noise from Luton Airport's helicopters and planes is the price to be paid for easy access to convenient air travel. However many others find it intrusive and annoying, and are very worried at the thought of more nuisance from overflying aircraft and helicopters. Their sleep is disturbed, and during the day aircraft that do not keep to the correct flight paths interrupt their waking hours too.

BUT there is another very important factor that is often overlooked – road traffic to and from the airport.

We are all aware of the heavy traffic in and around Harpenden, but because cars heading for the airport are not labelled as such their impact on local congestion is not recognised. Two-thirds of Luton Airport's passengers arrive and leave by road. Some of these of course will use the M1 but many passengers approaching the airport from other directions will use the A1081 or the B 653 (Lower Luton Road). Even if they park up in the Slip End Airoparks they will have driven through Hertfordshire to get to them.



The airport would like to see the proportion coming by public transport increase, but people like the convenience of car or taxi, and the shuttle bus from Luton Airport Parkway station is unpopular.

In calculating how many extra cars will be needed for the extra 9 million passengers we need to allow for some passengers such as business people driving themselves there and back. Business travellers are only 19% of Luton's users, the rest being holiday makers who may well be driven by friends or family in order to avoid the high cost of parking. That's four journeys per group: one there and one back at both the start and finish of the holiday.

So, to the sums: doubling the throughput of passengers will mean an extra 9 million people going out and returning. If two-thirds come by car or taxi as at present, then that is another 6 million on the roads. About a fifth of these would be business people who would probably not be sharing a car and would probably park it at the airport, so that would be 1.2 million road journeys. That leaves 4.8 million people, mainly holiday makers. We need to allow for some of them sharing a vehicle if they are travelling together, and for others whose journey is in a car or taxi that makes a return trip at the start and finish of the flight, ie two journeys per flight.

That could mean the number of car movements might be 3 million. Adding the two kinds of traveller together gives 4.2 million car journeys. Let's assume that one third of these use the M1. That leaves 2.8 million extra vehicles on our local roads, equivalent to 7,500 per day. And that's just the extra traffic caused by expansion of the airport – if these figures are right, we have 7,500 cars a day on our local roads already for people travelling to and from the airport.



Our roads were not designed for this level of extra traffic, and this is one of the reasons that your Society has objected to the expansion of the airport.

Primary Priorities

Ben Bardsley, newly appointed Chairman of the Harpenden Parents Group, with whom The Harpenden Society enjoys such a fruitful alliance, has sent The Society a review of the outcome of the 2012 situation with regard to primary school places. Here is a brief digest of his report.

The number of yearly applicants for Harpenden primary schools has risen from 385 in 2007 to 518 in 2012. Harpenden Parents Group (HPG) had warned Herts County Council in Autumn 2011 that additional places would be required in 2012. Despite this, no additional places, beyond those already announced at St Dominic's (30) and The Grove (15), were made available at the time parents applied for places. Confusion over the arrival of the Free School did not help, but as it became clear that the Free School would not be able to guarantee 60 extra places prior to allocation day in April, the local education authority had to find a solution.

They therefore decided to put in place a temporary expansion at Manland and Wood End schools. Rather than allocating these places on allocation day, they decided to leave 61 children without a place on allocation day and to allow all parents the chance of applying to the expanding schools. In HPG's view, this was the fairest way to allocate the extra places, but it led to great stress for those parents who initially found themselves without a place. HPG feel communication could have been better.

After the first round of continuing interest, all parents were allocated a place. Although HPG had campaigned for Manland and Wood End to be expanded, they also wanted High Beeches and Crabtree to be expanded, as these are the nearest schools for the greatest number of children. More parents are travelling across town to Wood End and adding to traffic congestion. HPG will continue to campaign for extra places at High Beeches and Crabtree next year.

For the second year running, HPG obtained over 1000 signatures for our petitions calling on HCC to plan properly and provide places in the right areas of town where the demand is. In each case, the petition has been formally presented to the council and we hope these will help provoke the council into ensuring they are better prepared for the expected high number of applicants.

Photos throughout (except where stated) courtesy of Harpendia.com. Harpenden's on line magazine and video channel.



Ben Bardsley writes

I believe that HPG has had an impact. The county council has received our petitions for two consecutive years, the press recognise our existence and our role in campaigning for better school place provision and in our view, the 2012 solutions put in place were better than those for 2011, partly due to the 2011 campaign. Herts County Council also better recognise us as a growing and established force in school place admissions. The Harpenden Society's meeting in February gave us a platform and helped us raise our profile. The meeting organised by The Harpenden Society between HPG and Herts County councillors and officers also helped. We have met with Herts C.C. a number of times during 2012 and I believe they do now listen to us more than they did last year. HPG's membership continues to grow. From 70 members in September 2011, we now have nearly 240.

Theodora's Journals

Readers will all recall the publication of 'Theodora's Journals' by the Harpenden and District Historical Society; we published details of how to obtain this attractive compilation by post a couple of editions ago. It is, for those living locally, more conveniently available, price £15, from the co-editor Amy Coburn who lives on Piggotshill Lane and may be contacted on 01582 460621

Society Meetings - Plants and Plans

Plants

Protests this summer over the GM food trials at Rothamsted made the TV news. This led over 70 townsfolk on 4th October to hear Professor Maurice Moloney, Director of the Rothamsted Institute speak at one of our regular public meetings about the research work on GM food. Professor Moloney is a high-powered and highly qualified figure, with over 80 scientific papers published in international journals and the holder of 300 patents in plant biotechnology



Rothamsted runs the oldest experimental plot in the world, known as the Broadbalk, which has had no fertilisers or chemicals in its 168 years. Yields there are about one tenth of what British farmers are achieving today with normal agricultural dressings.

As well as providing nutrients, agricultural chemicals can protect against pests and diseases, but it is known that in nature plants can defend themselves without our help, mint and hops being well known examples. If we could find out how they do this and apply the lessons to other crops, yields could be protected, the process is biologically less harmful, food security could be improved and a giant step towards feeding the world could be taken.

Mint and hops can't be crossed with wheat, so scientists have been looking for another way to transfer these natural protections to wheat. GM is the chosen technique. Far from being the plaything of madmen, GM is used in schools in Canada, in 3,000 laboratories around the world, and in the production of food that we and millions of others in Europe, the USA, China and Australia eat every day. And insulin for diabetics, animal feed and rennet for cheese are all made with GM products.

Canadian experience shows that soil structure, moisture retention, crop yields and CO2 retention are all improved with chemical usage reduced. And with the world population expected to grow to about nine or ten billion people by 2050, but with no more land than we have today, where is the food for all these extra people to come from?

Professor Moloney looked at the objections to GM, and dealt confidently with many questions from the audience, inclusive of several very sincere opponents of the scheme – and we would like to hear readers' views on this important topic whether 'aye' or 'nay'.

The topic of GM is lively, and our evening was helped by Professor Moloney's equally lively style. The many non-scientists in the audience were able to follow his clear explanations, and left with a better understanding of what is involved, and why the work is so important.

Richard Thomas

Plans

There was a big turn-out of customers eager to participate when Tim Riley, Society committee member and highly-rated and progressive architect, invited them to comment on his Harpenden Community Plan at the Society's public meeting on 25 October at Park Hall. In his suggestions for the how the town centre and its immediate surrounds might be holistically rejuvenated, he concentrated on how the Farmers' Markets might be reconfigured on both sides of the main road and the pedestrian spaces in the High Street might be better developed, how the 'Argos' library site might be made more flexible, how the Public Halls should be refurbished and how a cafe, plus add-on facilities, might most viably be built in Rothamsted Park.



In summing up an evening of lively and interesting exchanges, Chris Marsden, the Society's Chairman, succinctly concluded that there were mixed views about re-shaping the market, strong feeling against hard-coring any of the green pieces on the High Street, a wave of opinion in favour of pedestrianising the Lower High Street, firm support for more flexibility in the usage of the new library, massive encouragement for ideas about rebuilding the Public Halls and overwhelming backing for the cafe in the park.

And when it all comes to pass, a good time will be had by all...

Eric Midwinter

Editor's note: this item has been kept necessarily brief as the issue was extensively dealt with on both page one and two of the last (that is, the Autumn) edition of *The Harpenden Society News*.

Photos. Above left: Professor Moloney (left) with Chris Marsden. Above: Tim Riley (right) with Chris Marsden