

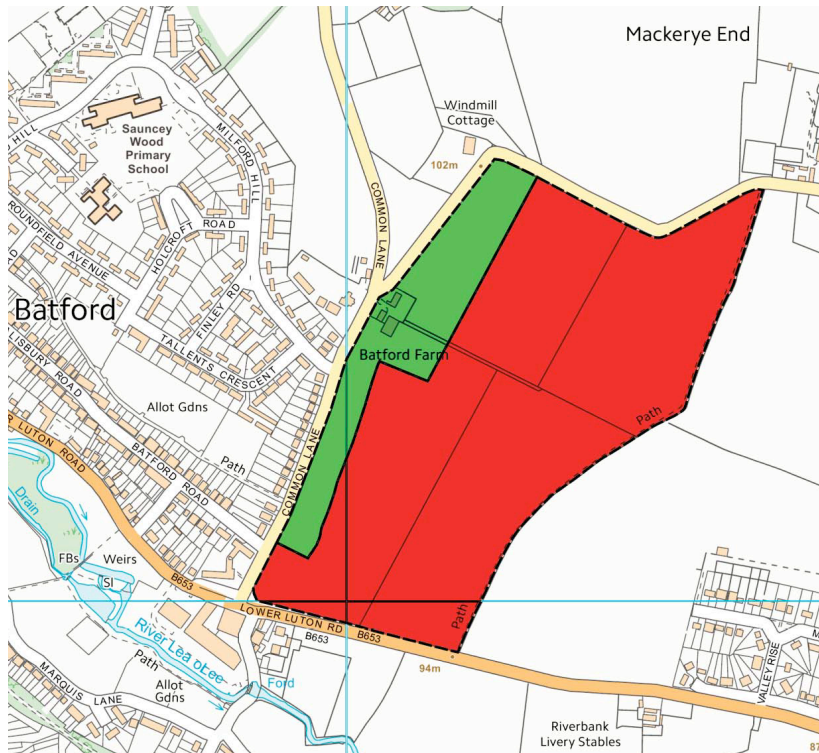


New secondary school plans revealed

At a series of exhibitions in the summer, local residents and parents of school-age children had a chance to scrutinise and comment on the Harpenden Secondary Education Trust (HSET) proposals for building a new secondary 'free' school, close to Common Lane and Lower Luton Road at Batford. The location was chosen after what the trust describes as a 'comprehensive site search exercise' in 2014. That search

Opposite the modern Lea Springs apartments, as far north as the intersection with Batford Road, the school site borders directly on to Common Lane. But beyond that point, for some 200m, it is set back by about 25m, leaving a strip of green 'retained land' for continued agricultural use, interrupted only by a pedestrian/cycle school entrance. Beyond Common Lane's junction with Milford Hill, that green strip opens out to between 45 and 80m wide – enclosing the existing Batford Farm buildings and extending to the northern end of the school site against the narrow lane leading to Mackerye End.

It should be made clear that, as we go to press, planning approval has yet to be granted. The plans, which are said to take into account the impact on Green Belt, traffic and transport, local heritage, flood and surface water, landscape and visual intrusion, are due to be submitted to Hertfordshire County Planning Authority in September. Nevertheless it was clear from the plans revealed at the public exhibitions that all those involved in the project are confident of its progress and fulfilment. **Article continues on page 2...**



failed to find a site of adequate size within Harpenden's urban boundaries, leading to the unavoidable need to encroach on Green Belt land.

The Katherine Warrington School is being established by the HSET, which comprises a partnership of the town's three existing secondary schools, the University of Hertfordshire and Rothamsted Research. The background to the naming of the school was reported in our Summer newsletter.

Trust chairman Philip Waters says the existing schools have taken increased numbers of pupils over the last decade, but it is neither feasible nor desirable for them to expand further. Hertfordshire County Council have agreed to purchase the 42 acres (17 hectares) of farmland needed for the new school buildings and accompanying sports fields and other facilities. The location and especially its Green Belt status have, not surprisingly, made the project controversial.



So as to minimise encroachment on the present green 'buffer' space between Harpenden's town boundary and Wheathampstead's Lea Valley Estate to the east, the school buildings will be located on the south-west part of the site, to within about 25m of Common Lane. Entrance for vehicles will be from Lower Luton Road, via a drive-round loop road designed to minimise traffic disruption on the B653. Adjacent tree planting – between a total of 111 parking spaces – is designed to soften the visual impact of the school development.

Herts County Council is expected to give the go-ahead for a new pedestrian crossing across the B653 outside the school main entrance. The proposals declare, optimistically, that 'a robust public transport strategy' is expected to deter car use by those travelling to and from the new school.

Concerns about possible flooding, bearing in mind the school's location at the lower end of a sloping site, have been addressed thoroughly, say the planners. A proposed 'infiltration basin' in the south-west corner of the site will, it is claimed, reduce the flood risk at its lowest point, along the Lower Luton Road boundary.

Artist's impressions show the red brick construction with large windows characterising the main school buildings, while the main entrance features what the proposals describe as 'full-height glazing framed with a small canopy'. However the sports hall – the first part of the project to be built – will be constructed of 'pre-cast concrete planks' on a steel frame, though with 'brickwork cladding' between areas of 'coloured render'.

Environmental concerns in regard to energy consumption and hence greenhouse gas emissions are said to have been addressed fully by Kier the developer, optimising the use of natural light without glare or summer time overheating. Low-energy LED main lighting is planned with roof-mounted photovoltaic solar panels further reducing regular energy costs. 'Natural ventilation' will complement what is described as 'high-efficiency thermal fabric', implying a high standard of wall and roof insulation.

Central government, that is the Treasury, has approved the full capital funding, thought to be between £5m and £6m, for construction of the school by Kier, the appointed developer. Governors have been nominated, as well as project manager and head teacher designate of the new school. He is Tony Smith, currently deputy head of Roundwood Park School.

Meanwhile, says Mr Waters, 'accountants and lawyers are driving the project forward'. Building work is due to start in March next year, with initial opening of the school scheduled for September 2018. It will initially accommodate six classrooms for around 180 year-7 students, in a block which will, when the whole development has been completed – scheduled for September 2019 – house the school's sports hall. The completed school is intended to cater for up to 1150 children. **THS**



KWS school plans questioned

Needless to say, there are those who view the Katherine Warrington School proposals less positively than HSET, the primary sponsor of the scheme. They were able to register their reservations by completing the questionnaire distributed at the public exhibitions, which is also available on the <https://kwschool.co.uk> website.

Most prominent among the objections to the KWS plans are those put forward by the pressure group '**Right School Right Place**' (RSRP). Its spokesperson and Common Lane resident Hillary Taylor asserts most fundamentally that HSET and Herts County Council have made inaccurate assessments of the demand for secondary school places in the Harpenden area in the years ahead. The need for a fourth secondary school in the town must, declares RSRP, be called into question.

In its July newsletter RSRP maintains that there never has been, nor is there forecast, more applicants from Harpenden than current places (existing intake capacity 572) at the three existing schools: Sir John Lawes, Roundwood Park and St George's. Around one third of secondary school pupils attending those schools live outside Harpenden, in Wheathampstead, Redbourn or the outlying villages.

According to RSRP – citing Herts CC forecasts – siting a new school at Batford would increase the average travelling distance for pupils across the present schools' catchment area, with the majority needing transport – rather than being able to walk or cycle. Based on projected pupil numbers coming from across the whole area served by Harpenden schools, RSRP concludes that, if a new secondary school is to be built anywhere, it would be most sensibly located at Wheathampstead.

Other objections to the proposals have come from archaeologists concerned about the possible disturbance of historically valuable Roman remains on the site. And there have been expressions of concern relating to the slope of the overall site and the consequent need for significant earth moving operations, especially at the northern end of the site to achieve – literally rather than figuratively – level playing fields for the school. Such earth moving will, it is argued, materially alter the present wholly-rural landscape detrimentally. **THS**

Leisure centre plans ‘fleshed out’ – with extra funding

Plans for Harpenden’s new Arts and Leisure complex in Rothamsted Park, outlined in our Winter 2016 Newsletter, were fleshed out in considerably greater detail at an exhibition in the town’s Park Hall in mid-August. The allocated budget has been upped by £800,000 to £18.8 million and the scheme was said by St Albans District Council officials at the July event to be going ahead on schedule. The new multi-function sports centre is due for completion in late 2019, with the theatre and arts hub following 12 months later.

Those heading the project say many of the comments and suggestions put forward by residents, following the initial unveiling of the scheme last year, have been heeded in drawing up the more detailed proposals on show at the August exhibition.

For example, the entrance to the new theatre and arts hub, which is being housed within the shell of the present sports centre, will comprise a wheelchair-accessible approach via a wide sweeping ramp on the west side of the building leading up to a spacious foyer at first floor level. (below) The foyer and its adjacent café/bar will afford uninterrupted views across the park.



Considerable attention has been paid in the updated proposals to the area of the park which currently separates, by a hundred yards or so, the swimming pool from the sports centre. Described in the plans as either an ‘activity square’ or a ‘focal space’, it is planned as an attractively landscaped open space, incorporating two of the park’s existing oak trees.

Because of the ground level difference between the new complex’s two main buildings, the area is bordered on the new sports centre side by a large area of terracing edged with stepped grass banks which sweep round the east side of the (essentially unchanged) swimming pool building. On the south – lower – side it is bordered by a long ‘sinuously curving’ timber bench.

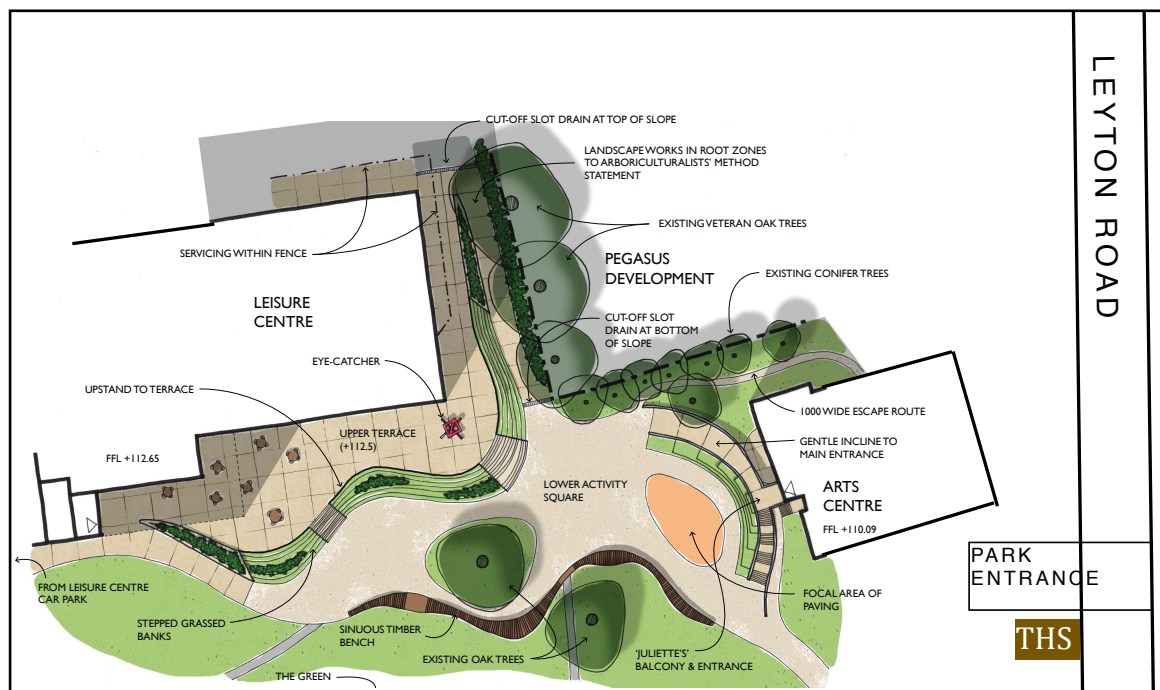
A 511-seat banked auditorium will occupy the main part of the new theatre and arts ‘hub’ building. The proposals include ‘Bleacher’ seating for the theatre; it can be mechanically compacted into a relatively small space when not in use, thereby maximising the level floor area available for, say, dancing.

Discussions with Harpenden Local History Society are ongoing with respect to the provision of a museum facility on the ground floor of the arts hub building, below the aforementioned first-floor foyer and adjacent café/bar. The plans show a 480sq ft museum archive room, next to a larger 630sq ft ‘meeting room’ in which regular HLHS exhibitions can be staged, but which would be available for a variety of arts/cultural functions.

Controversy looks likely to surround the proposal to wholly or partially remove the long 7- or 8ft-high beech hedge which presently borders the green space around the swimming pool. That is necessary, say the planners, to make room for the all-new 6800sq ft sports hall and its adjacent smaller activity ‘studios’ being grafted on to the south-west end of the swimming pool building, largely retained but extended to accommodate a larger 1830sq ft learner pool.

Importantly, for many users of the new sports and leisure complex, a new 110-space car park is planned on an area of ground on the west side of the new sports centre, which is currently used, irregularly, by Harpenden Town Football Club. It is described as a ‘green’ car park, being paved in pre-cast Grasscrete cellular concrete slabs which allow grass to grow through its interstices, giving the appearance, from a distance, of greensward. Another benefit is that it is self draining.

It has yet to be decided whether use of the new green car park should be restricted to users of the sports and leisure centre and, if so, how that would be monitored/enforced.



Churches seek to bring back a Citizens' Advice centre



Harpenden Churches Together – a consortium of places of Christian worship in the town – is appealing to church members for funding to help re-open a Citizens' Advice centre in Harpenden, two years after the former office closed.

Roy Swanston, a member of High Street Methodist Church, who is co-ordinating the initiative, says that at the time the centre, then located in the town hall, was closed, primarily for accommodation and cost reasons, it was serving around 300 clients a year. That equated, in terms of running costs, to about £35 per client per year. In turn, he adds, that brought a 'benefit' value of around £100,000 to their clients.

Citizens' Advice District Office in St Albans, which would be responsible for the oversight of a new Harpenden office, points out that to re-establish a presence in Harpenden, suitable accommodation will be needed together with set-up and running costs to maintain the service. Initial set-up costs are estimated to be in the region £10,000 with subsequent running costs amounting to another £10,000 per annum.

The District Office has expressed confidence that, with the support of the local churches, the set-up costs can probably

be raised from local Trusts. But some guarantee would be needed that subsequent running costs would be met for at least three years, ensuring confidence that the service could be supported in the longer term. On that basis the aim would be to have Harpenden's renewed Citizens' Advice service up and running by 1st April 2018

It is hoped, says Roy Swanston, to obtain a financial commitment from all the local churches so that they can approach St Albans City District Council, Harpenden Town Council and other bodies such as the Harpenden Trust, to seek their financial support for the project. Pledges of financial support have already been received from some churches in the town and, most gratifyingly, a commitment from the Salvation Army that the new Citizens' Advice centre in Harpenden can be located in their redeveloped building, free of charge, when this has been completed in April 2018.

If any Harpenden Society member thinks they might be able to help with the Citizens' Advice initiative, please contact Roy at roy.swanston@btinternet.com. **THS**

THE VILLAGE BAKER - RIP

Harpenden Society member Geoff Ackroyd, one of the town's best-known and possibly its longest-established resident, having been born above his family's baker's shop in Station Road, died in July aged 87. Following his father Ernest into the business, Geoff built it up eventually to a chain of seven bakery shops in Harpenden and surrounding villages. His reminiscences of the area's changing scene through his lifetime are recorded in the book he wrote in 2011, entitled 'The Village Baker'.

He married his wife Brenda at Harpenden's High Street Methodist Church in August 1953 and retained their church affiliations, latterly through his stewardship duties at Batford Methodist Church. Geoff was an active Rotarian and a strong supporter of the Harpenden Trust, the local charity which his father Ernie, as leader of the former Harpenden Urban District Council, helped establish.

As a Master Baker and Confectioner, Geoff Ackroyd was admired especially for his cake design and decoration. His design for a three-tier wedding cake for the marriage of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer in 1981 was accepted by Buckingham Palace.

Away from his bakery business interests, one of Geoff's great loves was the world of horses, as an owner and a keen participant in local horse shows and gymkhanas. Geoff leaves behind Brenda and their son Christopher and three daughters, Rachel, Miriam and Mary, along with six grandchildren. **THS**



Shaping the future of Harpenden with our new MP Bim Afolami

Thursday Sept 21
Listen to his thoughts...
Give your views... Ask questions



This is your opportunity to influence the future. Don't miss this unique event.

Public Meeting
7.30 pm Reception
8.00 pm Start
Thursday Sept 21
Park Hall, Leyton Road
Harpenden
BOOK YOUR TICKET FOR
FREE ENTRANCE via the
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PUBLIC MEETING
ORGANISED BY

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***Can't attend
this meeting on
Sept 21 and
want to ask our
MP a question?***

***Simply send an
email with your
question to our
Secretary
who will do so
on your behalf.***

secretary@harpendensociety.org

A Society 'postman' bows out

When each issue of the Harpenden Society newsletter leaves the printers, a small army of volunteering society members moves smoothly into action, charged with the responsibility of distribution – delivering the copies to over 600 households across the town.

Many of those 'deliverers' have been carrying out their sterling work for several decades, none more notably so than Bob Crouchley, a society member for 38 years. He has become progressively familiar with the idiosyncracies of the 30 or more letterboxes in Bloomfield Road, Hillside Road, Hollybush Lane and other streets on his 'round'.

Loud snapping dogs, often equally fierce flap return springs, resistance



from stiff interior 'bristles', boxes positioned at ankle height, others so small the newsletter can't be inserted without crumpling: they are just some of the 'deliverer' challenges, which Bob has good naturedly met without complaint.

But, as he reluctantly admits, his 90th birthday is looming and he feels he is ready to relinquish his Harpenden Society postman's role. So wholeheartedly grateful thanks are extended to Bob from everyone in the society, coupled with their good wishes for the future.

THS

EDUCATION MATTERS

*The Harpenden Society is looking for **someone with a broad but enthusiastic interest in the town's educational activity, to help establish an Education Working Group,** whose aim would be to promote co-operation on school and college issues and initiatives within the wider context of*

Harpenden's cultural amenities. Interested?

*Then please contact
Society Chairman Phil
Waters on*

philwaters7@hotmail.com

Did You Know? From Harpenden's history The Nickey Line

If you want to get from Harpenden to Hemel Hempstead by public transport in 2017 you have a number of alternatives. Current timetables show the quickest option, taking a scheduled 43 minutes for the nine-mile journey, is by Red Eagle bus route 307, via Redbourn. The snag is that it operates only once a day, leaving Church Green at 14.00, arriving at Marlowes, close to Hemel's main shopping centre, at 14.43. In the opposite direction Red Eagle's sole daily service leaves Hemel at 09.16, getting to Harpenden at 09.55.

Other, more frequent bus services connect the two towns, but they involve travelling a far greater distance, via either Luton or St Albans, where a change of bus is involved, resulting in a minimum journey time of 1 hr 12min and 46min respectively. And of course scheduled timings are nowadays all too often disrupted by traffic hold-ups.

You might prefer travelling by rail, to avoid road congestion, in which case your only choice is to catch a train from Harpenden to St Pancras, get the Circle Line to Euston and jump on a 'West Coast' commuter train to Hemel. It will take you a minimum of 1hr 36min accompanied by a formidably hefty fare.

But it was all rather different a hundred or more years ago, in the heyday of the Harpenden and Hemel Hempstead railway. A timetable from 1905 – by which time the branch had come under Midland Railway management – shows nine services in each direction. Scheduled journey time was 24 or 25 minutes, and that included stops to pick-up and drop passengers at Redbourn and two intermediate halts. A typical one-way fare for the whole route was less than a shilling,

and you could travel from Harpenden to Redbourn for just threepence ha'penny.

As long ago as 1862, a line effectively connecting the LNWR main line (today referred to as the 'West Coast' line) at Hemel – actually Boxmoor – with the Great Northern Railway on the east side of Harpenden was mooted, at an estimated cost of £70,000.

But squabbling among the railway companies and, not surprisingly, the landowners, probably to the delight of their respective lawyers, led to repeated delays before the new service, billed as running from 'Hemel Hempsted (sic) to Luton', opened on July 16 1877. It was stated at the opening that the total cost of the railway was £139,533 9s 4d, almost twice the estimate of 15 years earlier but nevertheless well within the 'authorised capital' amount.

The Luton reference was indeed accurate because,

initially, eastbound trains joined the Midland line near Hollybush Lane bridge on a tight bend, in a cutting which curved round to the north. A vestige of that long-neglected (and much overgrown) cutting can be discerned today, bordering the YWAM site. But it was soon concluded from disappointing passenger



A Hemel-bound train in 1906 waits to leave from Harpenden station's former 'bay' platform between platform 1 and Station Approach

numbers that the line needed to go directly into Harpenden station and new length of track in a cutting which curved to the south at Hollybush Lane was added in 1888.

Regular passenger services were maintained, albeit with various interruptions, on the Nickey line until June 1947, when it became effectively a 'goods only' line, latterly catering for the trains serving the Hemelite breeze-block factory. A unique slice of railway history finished regrettably with track lifting in 1982, prior to the route's transformation into a leisure footpath and cycleway.

Acknowledgement: 'The Harpenden to Hemel Hempstead Railway' by Sue and Geoff Woodward, published by The Oakwood Press. THS

EDITOR'S VIEW

Alan Bunting

Green Belt protection: don't cheer SLP's demise too loudly

Council tax is the heftiest of most households' regular domestic outgoings – more than we have to cough up for our electricity, gas or water. The amount creeps up every year, more or less in line with general inflation. For that reason we tend to pay it grudgingly, while at the same time acknowledging the important services provided by our three-tier local authorities: Herts CC, St Albans District (SADC) and Harpenden Town Council.

Most people could pinpoint shortcomings in the efficiency of some of those services – for example, a failure to repair potholes in a way that avoids a return visit from the road menders a month or two later, or a seeming lack of routine in emptying litter bins.

But there are less obvious ways that, judged on a value-for-money basis, our council tax payments are mis-spent. The most recent and most blatant, though regrettably unpublicised, example is surely the administrative cost of preparing and processing SADC's now-aborted Strategic Local Plan – an undisclosed amount, but thought by some of those who have been following the SLP saga closely, to be 'not unadjacent' to £1 million. And that does not include the salaries of council staff diverted from other work on to SLP preparation over six or seven years.

Rejection of the SLP last year by government planning inspector David Hogger, followed by the High Court judgment upholding the inspector's decision, has left the plan 'dead in the water', as the saying goes.

Had, hypothetically, SADC won its appeal on the 'duty to co-operate', it would then have had to prove its SLP draft to be 'sound'. It is thought that would have been a 'tough ask'. Developers would have argued that the number of new homes proposed was far too low. Some have already expressed confidence that they would convince a planning inspector accordingly.

We now have a situation where the 'methodology' – itself a ghastly piece of 'management speak'; what's the matter with 'method' – used by councils in their assessment of housing need, is being re-appraised by the Department of Communities and Local Government. Earlier in the year the revised guidance was scheduled to be published 'in the Autumn'. But that could of course be further upset by the backwash from Brexit.

The whole SLP farrago, stemming from SADC's failure to liaise with adjacent local authorities, most notably with Dacorum (Hemel Hempstead), on projected housing numbers, also led to the resignation of the council's Planning Policy Committee chairman Julian Daly, the councillor generally regarded as having masterminded the 'failed' SLP.



We are now faced with the prospect of an entirely new SLP having to be prepared, which has been estimated as likely to take another two or three years – and perhaps another £1m of council tax payers' money?



Above. Without an SLP in place, undesirable housing development could accelerate.

Meanwhile, the government is committed to getting more new homes built across the country, though its recently announced delay in issuing guidance on just how housing need should be assessed rather contradicts its earlier impressions of urgency on the issue. But the bureaucratic delay is unlikely to hold back development applications, developers and owners of potential building land perceiving fresh opportunities arising from SLP's confirmed rejection.

Where there is no government-approved strategic plan in place, and an application to build is turned down by a council, the developer can ask for an appeal to a 'higher authority', viz Mr Hogger or one of his planning inspector colleagues.

A key question for many people concerned about Harpenden, and its future as a pleasant country town in which to live, is whether, in the light of the SLP's 'double whammy' rejection, those sites nominated for new housing in the plan, especially those on designated Green Belt land, are now more – or less – vulnerable to sprawling urban development?

It is probably too early to say. There is however a risk that having already spent a million pounds or so and effectively achieved nothing, SADC will feel obliged to rein back its expenditure on a 'mark 2' SLP, to an extent that it becomes a 'weaker' document and, as such, more of a 'soft touch' for greedy developers as they frame their planning applications. THS

PUT THE (GREEN) FLAGS OUT!

Lydekker Park has been awarded its first Green Flag award, an accolade previously bestowed on Harpenden Common which, incidentally, is also listed among the nearly 1800 award recipients for 2017/18.

The national Green Flag scheme proclaims 'to recognise and reward well-managed parks and green spaces, setting the benchmark standard for the management of recreational outdoor spaces', with due recognition especially of the hard work of managers, staff and volunteers.

Local residents, notably from the Friends of Lydekker Park association, as well as Harpenden Town Council park maintenance employees attended the award ceremony with this year's town mayor Rosemary Farmer and her immediate predecessor Nicola Linacre present to receive the coveted Green Flag banner.

(Photo top right)

Town Council personnel and local residents gather in Lydekker Park for the Green Flag award presentation.

(Photo right)

Floral display bears testament to the park's award-winning attraction.

THS



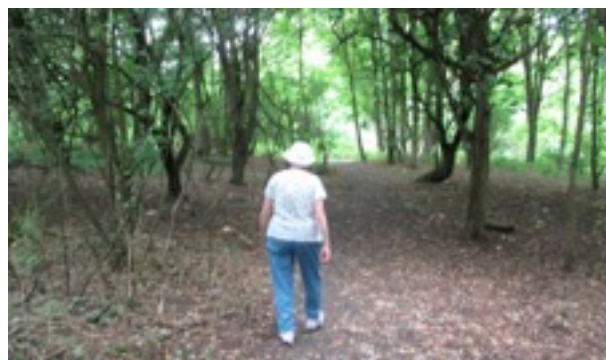
Woodland path is scouts' brainchild

A new half-mile long woodland path has been created, linking Crabtree Fields car park and the 10th Harpenden scout headquarters, off Aldwickbury Crescent, with the Lea Valley Walk which follows the line of the former Great Northern rail track. First proposed by the scouts themselves, who have taken on the responsibility for the path's upkeep, it skirts the green open area in front of their HQ before entering what is now mature shady woodland on what was formerly a municipal waste site.

Access to the path from the Lea Valley Walk – itself part of the national Sustrans-developed cycle way network – is via a flight of about 20 wooden-framed steps with a sturdy handrail. The £5000 cost of the steps and gravel path surfacing was met, says the town council, 'by a grant from the Fields in Trust charity, plus money contributed by property developers for local amenities and infrastructure'.

Photos right. *Sylvan tranquility has replaced what was formerly a municipal waste site. AND a new flight of steps connects the woodland path to the Lea Valley Walk along the old Great Northern rail route.*

THS



SOCIETY PUBLIC MEETING DATES

21st September -see page 5

19th October

7th December

Speakers are yet to be confirmed for Oct & Nov,
check our web site for details
www.harpendensociety.org

Please send comments on any of the articles or issues raised in this edition to the editor: Alan Bunting
editor@harpendensociety.org.
Sub-editor Harry Downie
Visit the Society's website –
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