



DANGER! Men (could possibly be) at work

The Harpenden Society has again become involved in the discussions over major development in the town. It is important that Society members are aware of what the issues are and how The Society is seeking to influence matters.

What has happened so far...

The St Albans District Council (SADC) is required to have a Strategic Local Plan (SLP) for the ordered use of land and housing development. Readers may recall that last November, its draft SLP was rejected. Without an SLP in place, the National Planning Inspectorate, which hears planning appeals, is less able to take account of the community when developers challenge local decisions.

The NPI has delivered two verdicts preventing building on green belt land. The inspectorate reckons the District has, year on year, met its current target of 360 new houses and that land is available for so doing for five more years. The NPI decided the developments did not satisfy the criteria for building on the green belt, a valuable precedent for the future.

Nonetheless, it is likely that the government will want SADC to build more houses and flats than the Council wishes and that this, for all the promises of its protection, will impinge on the green belt.

What The Society is doing...

We have joined the Harpenden Green Belt Association and the Town Council in a joint working party in an effort to influence the content of the next SLP. The working party has met twice, on the second occasion with SADC planners.

The Society stands firmly by its original position.

The grounds for us doing so are, briefly:

- that the Green Belt should on principle be protected.
- that it preserves the sustainability of the town.
- that the town's infrastructure could not cope with the extra population that developments on green belt would bring. There are already substantial deficits in our infrastructure. Schools, medical facilities, roads, parking, water and drainage would all be compromised further. It is worth noting that 300 new homes are being built or planned to be built in Harpenden at this time..

The Society's campaign on this issue in 2009/10 was very popular – 12% of households responded, with only four of 2,199 replies NOT in favour. A well-attended Harpenden Society public meeting exposed the fallacies in the SADC position. SADC councillors at the meeting were able to gauge the feeling of the town and retreated. **Thank you again for your help, but...**

BEWARE; your active support may well be needed again



The Harpenden in Question

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

10. Being Car-Full



It was in 1972 that Alisdair Aird published his dystopian traffic prediction *The Automotive Nightmare*, a gloomy picture of noisy, polluted gridlock. Forty years on, does Harpenden present some of the elements of his fretful dream? Certainly for those arguing that the town can take no more major development without extensive infrastructural resourcing – see our front page story – traffic is seen as a key issue.

To begin with, it is the fate of many town centres, or maybe even town squares once utilised for marketing and social purposes, to find themselves little more than stretches of main roads. Every working day 34,000 vehicles travel through along the A1081, that is 11.4m annually, with, at peak times, one every four seconds. **'Harpenden's own high street is everyone else's highway.'**

These are journeys into and/or out of Harpenden, exclusive, then, of internally generated traffic. Hertfordshire is one of the UK's most car-rich areas and it is estimated that there are 22,500 vehicles in Harpenden. Each day 25,000 private car 'trips' are initiated by Harpenden households. This amounts to some 9m a year – and 20% of all these journeys are of less than one mile. A 'trip' often constitutes two journeys, with a parking episode in between, such as a school run: 43% of Harpenden children are conveyed by car to and from school.

It is a remarkable fact for a purported commuter town that 56% of the employed population travel to work by car, wastefully carrying as few as only another 5% as passengers; that is, 61% travel by car to work. Indeed, the average occupancy for all car 'trips' is 1.6 persons. This is as opposed to only 18% who travel by train. Harpenden's roads are thus vital arteries for economic as well as domestic reasons and they are faced with serious clogging. Moreover, some 3000 commuters, a proportion of them rail-heading out-of-towners, are also using the roads. On a typical weekday there are 2400 traffic movements in and out of the station approaches.

Apart from any extra housing either in Harpenden or, say, in South Bedfordshire, the extra cars that would be generated by the proposed Luton airport expansion are calculated to be a further 7,500 a day.

A new estate of 250 houses on the outskirts of the town would mean something like 500 extra cars and roughly

the same number of additional 'trips'

The unknown factor and one extremely difficult to gauge is the use made of Harpenden's facilities by incomers from smaller surrounding settlements, such as those driving to Harpenden for schools, shops, railway transit and sundry other purposes. This is a very difficult number to estimate but it is not small and there are few if any signs that it will not increase..

The case for promoting even more car usage in the town through extra housing development looks even weaker.



'With so much traffic movement Harpenden faces gridlock' ... and the prediction is that between now and 2021 traffic growth in the District of St Albans will be 11.5%

Could that 'automotive nightmare be beckoning?

Eric Midwinter

Sources – Department of Transport Travel Survey (2011) Herts County Council Traffic and Transport Data Report (2010) and Herts County Council Travel Survey (2013)

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

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Don't get slammed and keep out of the Boiler Room

...or as the classical text has it, 'caveat emptor'...our ebullient Public Order Working Group Convenor, Alan Jackson, as in previous issues, offers advice on the latest scams and dodges. Yes, it is very much a matter of 'buyer beware'

Slamming

A Harpenden householder recently discovered that his telephone land-line had gone dead. His phone company told him that in future his services would be supplied by another company.

He'd been 'slammed'.

Changing subscribers' telephone services without their apparent consent is widespread. Astonishingly, in 2011 520,000 households, according to OFCOM, are thought to have had their land-line or broadband services switched without agreement. 'Slamming' began after the deregulation of the telecommunications industry in the mid-1980s and, whilst a mis-selling practice rather than a criminal offence, it amounts to a dreadful nuisance for the victim. Occasionally, it also happens by error when consumers do switch suppliers or move house and the wrong line is taken over. Mobile phone contracts are also susceptible to 'slamming'.

'Slamming' may result from you completing a survey or entering a contest. The 'small print' in your entry may include an authorisation to switch. Or a salesperson, purporting to be from your current carrier, may entice you with a free upgrade or an improved rate.



www.ofcom.org.uk

OFCOM is attempting to clamp down on the problem and the OFCOM website, telling you how to make a complaint, is easy to find. OFCOM offers the following advice.

*be cautious of giving personal information over the phone.

*be absolutely sure before signing up to anything over the phone – better to ask to deal with the matter by post.

*be sure to ask doorstep sellers for ID.

*only give Direct Debit details when you have initiated the deal yourself.

*don't sign anything until you have read the small print carefully.

Boiler Rooms

This second horror involves banks of telephones in rented offices from which people are persistently pressed by seemingly pleasant and professional sales staff into buying company shares. 'Boiler rooms' are often located overseas and may be outside the jurisdiction of UK law and the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). The shares will be high-risk and will be worth a lot less than the customer is asked to pay. The shares may be unlisted and it may not be possible to trade them subsequently. Indeed, they may not exist at all.

It is important to note, all you Harpenden shareholders, that this scam is targeted directly at experienced investors, not the the innocents abroad – and the FCA say the average sum lost per victim is £20,000. If you think you have been approached, 'slam' down the phone as impolitely as you like and call the FCA on 0800 111 6768 (freephone)

Email: consumer.queries@fca.org.uk

www.fca.org.uk



....and finally

If you've survived 'slamming' and 'boiler rooms', think 'smoke alarms', authentic smoke alarms, that is. You can contact the Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service and request a free home fire safety visit. They will fit a smoke detector free of charge if they think you need one. The phone number is 0300 1234 046 but some people have found it more satisfactory to use 01727 818919. They may be found online at (<http://www.hertsdirect.org/actweb/fireandrescue/hfscformrequest.htm>)

Personal: Parking and Pedestrians

Dear Fellow-travellers

I thought it was an urban myth. Then one day a car was parked outside our house. The driver remained in the car until a taxi arrived and carried his luggage and himself away. Fifteen days later a taxi made the reverse journey and a bronzed figure stowed his cases in the car and drove away, having, presumably, dodged the expensive Luton air port parking charge. I am told it is a common practice.

I find it strange that people feel it right to colonise a space on the public highway for their own deployment. Stopping for an hour or so makes practical sense but some of this parking is regular, as in those who park and walk to the station to avoid parking costs, or permanent, as in outside their home. Whatever the ethics of such habits, they jointly create conditions whereby some of Harpenden's roads are, in part or whole, transformed into one-way streets.



I discovered that, for all the traffic that is on the move, the average car is parked somewhere 90% of the time. Harpenden's car parks already operate at 80/95% capacity on working days and, as 42% of Harpenden households have two, three or more vehicles, it is not surprising that on-street parking is substantial.

I have also on two recent occasions barely avoided nasty injury when walking, 'sober and properly dressed', as army protocol ran, along the pavements after midnight when the town is plunged into perilous darkness. I stumbled into cars parked partway on the pavement, in likely contravention of the 1835 Highways Act and Rule 244 of the Highway Code. This creates a perilous impediment for pedestrians, especially young parents with buggies or prams, and there is patently a growing incidence of this hazard. Recently I have noted and had mentioned to me by neighbours the phenomenon of cars parked with all four wheels completely on the pavement, thereby creating an absolute pavement barrier.



I would draw readers' attention to the national charity 'Living Streets', which is nobly campaigning for a total ban on pavement parking in a situation where the law is complex and hard to enforce. The charity urges people to approach their local authority. The response to such enquiry of the SADC parking office was that it was neither instructed nor resourced to be pro-active.

I believe that the current fate of the pedestrian touches on the nub of the quality of life issues involved. Happily, the 2011 national traffic accident figures showed an improvement with 1900 killed and 23,000 seriously injured in the year, although the child victim figures were still higher than the European average. Nonetheless, the sad explanation was that this lowering of casualty numbers is in main part due to the fact that pedestrians, particularly vulnerable groups such as children and older people, simply and sadly not walking the streets

I feel it right to convey to everyone the alarming news from the Parliamentary Environmental Audit Committee that outdoor air pollution, crucially the output of vehicular traffic, is responsible for 29,000 deaths annually in the UK. Add in the perpetual noise factor and one can understand the claim made recently by one transport commentator that 'in the struggle for the streets the pedestrians lost'.

I muse finally over the paradox that whereas drug suppliers and dealers are more vigorously punished than drug users, those who manufacture and retail cars capable of breaking the national speed limit go unpunished, while law-breaking drivers are faced with penalties.

Yours movingly

'Strolling'

(courtesy of Flanagan and Allen)

Memos for Members

Summer Events-A Study in Meteorological Contrasts

Although **The Harpenden Society News** is keen to sustain its reputation for an upbeat and sunny approach, austere reality must prevail. Truth will out, our marquee at Discovery Day was mainly notable for the courage and stamina of the brave stalwarts who staffed it and struggled to keep it on terra firma as the rain lashed and the wind howled.

Were we 'discovered' on Discovery Day?

Ron Taylor writes:

Intrepid visitors to The Harpenden Society stand at Harpenden's Discovery Day on 15 June were not disappointed. After an early start the new marquee and the new graphic panels were installed, despite the high winds, by three committee members -Chris Marsden, Bob Fletcher and Ron Taylor. The finished stand with its messages concerning four 'Big Issues' in Harpenden - Revitalising the Red House; Maintaining a thriving High Street; Proposing a Cafe for Rothamsted Park and Developing the Public Halls, attracted a number of visitors who discussed their views about these subjects. Copies of the Summer Newsletter and 'Big Issue' leaflets were given out during the day, hopefully encouraging some new members to join.



Above. The Society's new marquee had a somewhat turbulent start to its life as the outdoor frame for advertising our activities

As a typical early Summer's day it was windy, cool and wet, so the expected crowds did not materialise to witness an array of activities: sheep shearing, ferret racing, archery, welly wanging, chainsaw sculpturing, birds of prey displays, dog displays and country fayre stalls.

The event was well organised by Harpenden

Town Council and our thanks to them for their efforts in supporting this annual community event.

What a contrast between Discovery Day and the very sunny and pleasingly dry conditions which prevailed when some 45 members enjoyed a very informative visit to Rothamsted Research on Friday 14 June, for The Society's annual summer event.

Were we fascinated by Rothamsted Research's Researches?

Bob Fletcher writes:

The visit started with a short walk to the Park Grass Classical Experiment, the world's oldest ecological experiment. There Rothamsted's Dr. Andy MacDonald gave a short talk on the history of the experiment. Then from the very old to the brand new when the members were escorted past the security barriers to visit the GM wheat field trial site (below) where Professor Huw Jones gave a fascinating and informative talk about the objectives of the trial and the progress that had been made so far.

This was followed by a drinks reception at the Manor House where Professor Jones was available to answer a multitude of probing questions from members about the technology used in the GM wheat trial. The visit concluded with Professors John Jenkyns and Roger Plumb giving members a tour of the Manor House and explaining its fascinating history.



Society Public Meetings

Thurs 26 September

**Police and Crime;
the New Commissioner's Role**

David Lloyd, Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire.

Don't miss this opportunity to listen to and question the recently appointed Police and Crime Commissioner. The Society counts itself extremely fortunate to have booked this significant speaker.

Thurs 24 October

'Change is coming - can Harpenden cope? - roads, schools, trains, water. An open discussion with experts.

Thurs 12 December

The Library; its Role in our Community: Taryn Pearson, Assistant Director, Customer Services and Libraries; Health and Community Services.

As usual, the meetings will be held at Park Hall, Leyton Road, beginning at 8.0 pm, with refreshments available from 7.30 pm.

Foresters win Laurels

On Wednesday 17 July Chris Marsden, our chairman, presented The Harpenden Society Plaque for 2012 to Mike Peters of the Jarvis construction company. This is the highest of The Society's awards for projects that have added value or appeal to the town's physical environment. This development of flats and small houses behind Bowers Parade has, in the considered opinion of the awards panel, enhanced the area significantly.



Above: Mike Peters of the Jarvis construction company receives the prestigious plaque from Society chairman Chris Marsden, with Society stalwarts in attendance, all in summer array, and with the winning development in the background.

The Red House and the Health Fair

Make a note of Saturday 28 September when the highly effective Davenport House Patients Group celebrates its 20th anniversary with its second 'Health Fair' to be held in the Public Halls. This will offer a wide-ranging programme of stalls, short talks, stage events, children's activities and refreshments. The Fair opens at 10.0 a.m and closes at 2.0. p.m.

One of the stalls will be run by The Society on behalf of The Red House Forum, the hard-working group dedicated to revivifying that local asset which is held in such affection. Visit our stall to find out what we are trying to do and/or to show your support for our efforts.

Davenport House Patient Group

1993-2013

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You, your children and their health

Health Fair, Harpenden Public Hall
September 28th 2013
10.00am - 2.00pm, **Free Admission**

Talks by Experts • Stage Performances
Exhibitors • Kidz Play Zone • Refreshments

www.davenporthouseppg.org.uk

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Do you react negatively to Good News

Noel Coward sang 'there is bad news just around the corner' and that seems to suit people all over the world. Pollsters find that, to quote one, 'people are hugely prejudiced against good news.' When they are given a piece of positive information, say the pollsters, apparently their first instinct is to disbelieve it, while a pessimistic item is treated as unvarnished truth.

A lot of people are deniers, simply saying, when faced with testimony which contradicts their own view, that it is wrong. It was the literary critic Andrew Lang who wrote of the man who used statistics as a drunken man uses lamp-posts – 'for support rather than for illumination' – and that may be advisable. What is certain is that, in civic and social matters, fact-based evidence is preferable to anecdote and personal impression. Yet, according to rueful pollsters, the public often prefers a gut-reaction, usually a miserable one..

Surely that cannot be the case in Harpenden, with all its comforts and delights. Surely the town's inhabitants are bubbly and smiling, ready to relish any excellent news. Surely our fellow-townfolk would respond favourably and rapturously were they to learn something of general advantage.

Test yourself honestly against these examples from a national Ipsos-MORI poll undertaken in July of this year. The poll sought to discover the nearest to what the majority perception was about a number of social issues. See whether in each case your glass is fuller or emptier than the reality or whether your perception is gloomier or cheerier than the vast majority? Here are four publicly held perceptions:

Statements

1. Crime is not falling (this is what 58% of respondents believe) Yes or no
 2. Immigrants make up 31% of the population. What % do you think it is?
 3. 15% of teenage girls experience pregnancy. What % do you think it is?
 4. Benefit fraud accounts for £24 out of every £100 of the welfare budget.
- What fraction of each £100 do you think it is?

1. Yes it is. Between 2007 and now crime fell by 19%, although, sadly, it is thought this is not true of domestic violence; 2. Immigrants make up 13% of the population; 3. 0.6% of teenage girls experience pregnancy; 4. benefit fraud accounts for 70p in every £100 of the welfare budget, meaning that the public perception is 34 times worse than the actual figure.

Answers

All figures based on official government data for a poll on behalf of the Royal Statistical Society and King's College, London.

Were you a Scrooge before or after redemption, a Jeremiah or a Pollyanna?