



SLP A 'DISGRACE' SAYS LOCAL QC

from our editor-in-waiting Alan Bunting

Rothamsted Fowden Hall was filled to capacity when over 200 Harpenden residents invited by The Harpenden Society attended a meeting in early February, to learn more, and better understand, the implications of St Albans District Council's Strategic Local Plan (SLP).



An introduction by planning expert David Churchill of Icen Projects spelled out the statutory, but tortuous, consultation procedures involved in preparing the SLP for subsequent examination by central government inspectors. That vital examination, scheduled to take place in November of this year, will determine whether the plan is found to be 'justified' and/or whether it requires alteration.

County Councillor David Williams explained that, once approved, the SLP will be followed in due course by a more detailed local plan, with November 2017 as a target date for its publication. He added that all residential developments included in the SLP were required to include some 'affordable housing', though with no precise definition of the term.

Joanne Wicks QC, representing Harpenden Green Belt Association, expressed the view that the SLP in its updated draft form was, from a legal standpoint, not only a 'mess', but a 'disgrace'. She described it as a 'political' rather than a 'strategic' plan; its Harpenden-related provisions appeared to have been unduly influenced by councillors representing other parts of the district. They were seemingly bent on exercising their power by sacrificing Green Belt land for housing, especially in Harpenden. In any case, she said, the need



Above from L2R: David Churchill, Cllr. David Williams.
Joanne Wicks, Cllr. Terry Heritage

to build on open countryside in order to meet so-called 'housing need' was highly questionable.

Ms Wicks was particularly critical of the proposal to build up to 500 homes on Green Belt land on the north side of Harpenden, designated S5 on the SLP. An independent report commissioned by the council recommended that Green Belt development should be approved only under 'exceptional circumstances'. The report's findings had been disregarded, so that such 'circumstances' had not been established or declared. She added that, from a sustainability aspect, no traffic modelling had been carried out in relation to the S5 development, despite the nearby rush-hour congestion. Nor had there been detailed discussions with Hertfordshire County Council or the Highways Agency on the traffic implications.

St Albans District Council could meet its obligations to build 8720 new homes, in the period 2011-2031, without needing to encroach on Green Belt land, declared Ms Wicks. New 'brownfield' sites were becoming available in the district, notably where numerous former offices were being converted into residential accommodation.

Cllr Teresa Heritage raised further practical infrastructure questions as to the viability of the SLP proposals for site S5 in north Harpenden. There were already problems of sewer and surface water capacity, she said, which would be greatly exacerbated by a development on the scale proposed.

See top of page two for a further comment.

...BUT ANSWER CAME THERE NONE...

*'O Oysters' said the Carpenter,
You've had a pleasant run.
Should we be trotting home again?
But answer came there none.*

It is with some active sense of relevance that one quotes Lewis Carroll's nonsense poem, when discussing the District Council's heavily criticised Strategic Local Plan. However, there is a more immediate appropriateness. When an invitation – sent twice - to attend the above reported meeting was made to all Harpenden's district councillors, there were two welcome acceptances, a few refusals and four who, astonishingly, made no reply at all. Which studied discourtesy might give pause for furious thought.

Green Light for the Red House

The Red House Forum has been informed that the Herts Community NHS Trust board has approved the Strategic Outline case for the development of the Stewarts building as a health and wellness hub, with the allied objective of using the surplus land for an associated communal purpose, using land sales to meet the ongoing costs of the new facility. There are possible constraints – 'best value' for the taxpayer must be demonstrated in any sales and the Secretary of State has powers to take up to 50% of any land values – but the NHS authorities are extremely optimistic of a positive outcome.

Welcome news indeed.



Keeping Watch

...with the help of our eagle-eyed friends of the Community Safety Working Group

Courier fraud

This type of crime involves fraudsters calling on people and tricking them into handing over their cards and PIN numbers to a courier on their doorsteps.

Typically, fraudsters cold call you on a landline, claiming to be from your bank or the police. They say their systems have spotted a fraudulent payment on your card (or say it's due to expire and needs to be replaced). So that you can check that they're genuine (which they're not, obviously) they suggest you hang up and ring the bank or police immediately. But they don't disconnect your phone from the line that they're using so that when you dial the authentic number you are, in fact, still speaking to the fraudster (or their assistant). They then ask you to read out your PIN or type it out on your phone keypad. They may ask for details of other accounts you hold with the bank or with another financial service provider. They then send a courier to your house to collect your bank card. By then the fraudster will be in possession of your name, address, full bank details, card and PIN! **To protect yourself there are certain things you need to know:**

No bank will ever send a courier to your home
Neither your bank nor the police would ever collect your bank card, nor would they ever ask for your PIN or phone to ask you to withdraw money or move money to another account for 'safe keeping' or any other reason.
If you receive a call that you think may be of this type **put the phone down as soon as your suspicions arise. Then report the incident to the police on 101.**

Protecting mobile devices

A substantial number of us live our lives through our mobile devices: if we are suddenly deprived of them through theft we feel devastated. Most people who use these devices to this extent will be fully able to access information about keeping these devices safe; the essentials are as follows:

Install a tracker/security app (helps trace your device, allows you to wipe personal data in the event of theft);
seek advice from your device's manufacturer
Report thefts of mobile devices to your network and the police (who don't seem to realise that this isn't easy if the device has been stolen!); they will ask you for the device's International Mobile Station Equipment Identity (IMEI) number (the IMEI can usually be found printed inside the phone's battery compartment – or smartphone users can key in *#06# to see the number displayed on-screen).
Smartphone users need to keep a record of this number!

Register your mobile device for free at www.imobilise.com (records your IMEI number and allows the police to trace the owner)

Ensure your device is password protected

Never leave your device on view – and beware of pickpockets!

The Harpenden in Question

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

20. Why Civil Society needs Civic Societies



There are an estimated 300,000 drug addicts in the UK – and 33% of theft and property offences are drug-related. There are 120,000 licensed premises in England and Wales, with a turnover of £22bn a year – and 40% of violent crimes are alcohol-related. Although police numbers rose from 60,000 in the 1930s to 140,000 by the end of the last century, reported crimes sprang from less than 0.5m to 3.5m annually in the same period and prison numbers grew from 30,000 to 86,000.



Similarly schooling is radically effected by social factors. Research suggests that a child's development score at 22 months is an accurate predictor of educational outcomes at 26 years of age. One key to this is the gap between language rich and language poor households, with children from the former having heard up to 30m more words than the latter by the age of three. A report from the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission in 2015 based on its longitudinal study of some 17,000 children born in a particular week of 1970, showed that children from a high income background with LOW academic ability when aged five are a third more likely to have higher earnings at the age of 42 than children of poorer families with HIGH ability at five.

Some of you may recall my editorial in the previous newsletter on the social causes of ill-health. Health along with crime and education offer three examples of where the community determines its own social destiny. Traffic congestion is another one. The institutions created to deal with these issues, such as schools, hospitals and prisons, grapple, often bravely, with these situations but they are relatively powerless to alter the underlying basic causes. Politicians, central and local, and professional cadres strive to find answers, frequently performing with energy and skill. But they are akin to a gallant fire brigade that dowses some of the flames but cannot prevent the conflagration.

Some may resignedly and negatively yield to a gloomy pessimism, as in:

*There once was a man who said 'damn,
I suddenly see what I am.
I'm a creature that moves
In predestinate grooves
I'm not even a bus; I'm a tram.'*



A good civic society puts the case for the bus. It recognises that communities are organic entities, flexibly capable of change. A community can act collectively to halt bad and encourage good changes but it requires constant vigilance and an awareness of how communal factors shift the levers of its facilities and amenities. It is the task of a civic society, such as the splendid Harpenden Society with its long history of public good, to act as cultural and social sentinel for the town, alert to helping its host community understand these communally related problems and respond positively to them.

Eric Midwinter



Letters from the Editor

An Urbane Word about Urban Life

Mathematicians have proved to be shrewd publicists. In Victorian times (and, to hear some politicians talk, still today) it was the Three Rs, which gave the mistaken notion that 'rithmetic is of the same importance as reading and writing. Then they went one better in the 20th century in coining 'numeracy', with the pretence that it was equal in significance to 'literacy', a very dubious proposition - the consequence being that most children find themselves celebrating Holy Maths every morning like papal adherents.

In another such mythical fashion, 'rural' is often set against 'urban' as though it necessitates the same attention, a deplorable error; especially when one finds townfolk so beguiled by the concept that they fall into the trap of admiring the purported 'village' aspects of their town. Then they run the risk of putting the poplars first and the populace second. One of the reasons The Harpenden Society is a 'civic' rather than an 'amenity' group is to ensure it is all-embracing of all the town's anatomy and not just its flora and fauna.

In effect, and using the norm of 2000 constituting an urban settlement, the World Bank figures for 2013 indicated that some 10% of the UK population was 'rural' but that the 90% of urbanites occupied only 6.8% of the landscape. Furthermore, a National Eco-system Assessment in 2012 showed that, such are the green and allied areas within towns, 'the proportion of the English landscape built upon is 2.27%.'

We need to put so much more effort into ensuring our towns, one hopes 'new' as well as old, are well-balanced socially and ecologically and that they are, as human settlements, decently sustainable

'Townie'

Housey Housey

That synonym for Bingo, with its winning cry of 'House', is no bad symbol for the lottery that is the building industry. Given the threat of an overdeveloped Harpenden, it came as some surprise to read the Local Government Association's announcement that planning permissions are in place for 475,647 homes that remain completely or partially unbuilt. That is three times the number of homes constructed in the last financial year. Indeed, the number of new-builds in the last five years was the smallest number for any five year peacetime period since the 1920s. This followed an earlier report that the country's top nine developers were sitting on enough land, some with, some without planning permission, to build 615,152 homes.

This rather goes against the excuse that onerous planning restrictions are a barrier to solving the housing crisis. One must wonder whether the primitive state of the British construction industry's productivity and, dare one suggest it, a slice of being choosy about when and where to build according to profitability could possibly have something to do with this curious condition.

Might it be a good idea to ensure that all those options were taken up before developers come descending, as did Lord Byron's Assyrian, 'like a wolf on the fold' of tender lambs such as poor old Harpenden?

'Sheep-dog'

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

Alan Bunting writes

Car parking nightmares

Not surprisingly, today's nightmare car parking problems became a priority topic among the 50 members present. Commuter 'street' parking was highlighted but, even more critically the station car parks were often full to capacity. County Councillor David Williams, who bravely fielded many of the questions raised, said that Network Rail had earmarked £2 million in 2013 for the erection of a major 'Meccano like' double-deck structure on the east station car park. Planning permission had been refused because of objections from residents in nearby Milton Road. Also mentioned was the congestion of rush hour traffic and pedestrians at the east side's only (Station Road) entrance. This was said to be under active consideration by both rail and local authorities. Councillor Williams recommended members of the Harpenden Society and others to keep lobbying SADC on all the planning-related station car park issues.

Other car-related issues included the School run' congestion ('let them all walk or use the school bus' was the cry - but what about parents on their way to work?) pedestrian/traffic 'shared space' conflict (chiefly in the Lower High Street area) and

Pavement cyclists (not a loved practice but a pity there is no room for Dutch-style cycleways)



New secondary school

When the informal debate switched to Harpenden's need for more secondary school places, it was confirmed that the new school would be built on the corner of Lower Luton Road and Common Lane, an important factor being other landowners hanging on for a higher price for house building. Due to open in 2017, possibly in temporary buildings, the new secondary school would cater for children from the Harpenden and the 'villages'.i

James Marshall redevelopment

What was happening with the proposed redevelopment of the James Marshall home site behind the town hall? That was another question raised at the December meeting. Though the initial plans for an apartment complex submitted by the developer, were turned down, participating architect (and Harpenden Society member) Tim Riley said they had now gone to appeal. On Jan 19 the Planning Inspectorate overruled SADC's Planning department's decision and granted full approval to proceed, subject to certain conditions



Arts 'hub' proposal

Expenditure by SADC on the recently-opened St Albans City Museum had largely drained the culture-related public coffers but Hilary Taylor, a leading light in the recent 'We are Harpenden' arts 'hub' campaign, said the need was less for premises and more for a network of facilities. Councillor Williams argued that the chances of obtaining worthwhile public funding, though slim, would be enhanced by the active involvement of organisations in the surrounding area.

Calling all Volunteers

Alan Bunting, soon to be Editor of the newsletter reports on another of The Society's public gatherings

At a meeting convened by the Harpenden Society at the end of January, under the banner of Volunteer for Harpenden (V4H), representatives from numerous local organisations, reliant for their continuing activity on volunteer helpers, came together with existing and potentially new volunteers. As Society chairman Chris Marsden explained, a key aim of the meeting was to bring to the notice of a wider cross-section of Harpenden residents the enormous amount of volunteer work already undertaken in the town and the correspondingly wide range of volunteering opportunities for those with some time to spare.

Among the people attending the V4H meeting were representatives from Harpenden Parents Group, the Local

History Society, the Samaritans, Harpenden Helping Hand, the Harpenden Trust and several charities.

During a fruitful inter-active discussion, there was a chance for organisations represented to spell out the kind of needs that could be met by new volunteers, even for a few hours a week.



Above The V4H committee & funding partner Cllr Teresa Heritage. From L to R: Ron Taylor, Teresa Heritage, Bob Fletcher, Mary Maynard, Chris Marsden, David Abernethy

Writes Shirley Thomas

Dear Everyone

I just wanted officially to thank The Harpenden Society for the wonderful tribute to Richard. The collection for the bench erected in his memory far exceeded the cost and the surplus has gone to the Prison Fellowship to help fund a course in his name. This is a 'restorative justice' course at the Mount Prison Bovingdon. I am sure many of you heard him speak about this work that he was involved in.

I do hope some of you will be able to go to the 'little woods' at the top of our road (Bloomfield Road) – they are actually called Ambrose Woods – where you will see his bench. He always wanted a bench visible from the drive to the hospital, in case anyone going to or from the hospital might want to 'rest awhile'.



'Thank you all so very much for your generosity – we shall continue to love and care for our town as he always did'.

Best wishes - Shirley Thomas

Editor adds; ' do go and see the bench; as I have found, 'sitting's believing' – and Shirley also thanked The Society very sincerely for Richard's posthumous 'Without Whom' award of a 'beautiful silver picture frame'.

Annual General Meeting

Please note: The Harpenden Society gives notice that the annual general meeting will be held in Park Hall 7.30 for 8.00 Thursday 21 April

Without Whom- Psst- Read this as a Whisper

The 'Without Whom' award is given by The Harpenden Society News for those who have given decisive service to the town on behalf of The Society. The first three 'without whomers' – **Ron Taylor, Liz Trounce and the late Richard Thomas** – went to three people who had brought very practical and outgoing skills in aid of The Society and, by that token, the townsfolk of Harpenden. But it would be foolish to neglect those wonderful back-room operators of the silent service who give unsparingly of time and acumen for the cause.

How often do they go unrecognised! But they do not escape the sharp eyes of The Harpenden Society News. For the better part of a half decade, said by some to be one of the busiest five years in The Society's honourable history, one man has mastered the administrative construct, arranged and serviced the meetings, both committee and public, organised the transport and setting up of much of the equipment and background settings for meetings both indoor and out, salvaged the website and created an up-to-date and informative device, ensured that, on the legal front, all the tricky business of running a modern charity was completed satisfactorily and without fuss, and found time to offer sage advice and constant support to his fellow-officers...phew...yes, it fair takes yer breath away...he without whom little of this would have been achieved half so effectively, smoothly and effortlessly, he who might easily have starred instead of John Wayne in John Ford's 1952 classic *The Quiet Man*, is our **redoubtable Secretary, Bob Fletcher** .



P.S ...Psst...and we put this notice at the bottom of the back page in keeping with the theme of George Smiley-type undercover work of high quality...