

# THE HARBORNE SOCIETY

Number Fifty Eight  
Summer 2006



# NEWSLETTER

[www.theharbournesociety.org.uk](http://www.theharbournesociety.org.uk) [harbournesociety@hotmail.com](mailto:harbournesociety@hotmail.com)

## **HARBORNE SWIMMING POOL AND FITNESS CENTRE**

### **COUNCIL FINALLY TAKES THE PLUNGE!**

Wonderful news! At last, the City Council has finally authorised action that will, hopefully, see real progress being made towards securing the long hoped for new swimming pool. Faced with overwhelming public support for a new facility on the existing site in Lordswood Road, officers have been instructed to start planning to enable a business case to be prepared leading to bids being submitted for capital funding.

In May, shortly after the elections Councillor John Alden, the then [but sadly no longer] Cabinet Member for Leisure Services, instructed officers to move forward on the basis of a 25 metre swimming pool, a teaching pool and a first floor sports hall. Officers are apparently to produce the business plan within three months. This action was taken in the light of the public consultations carried out by the Council as

well as the nearly one thousand expressions of opinion from residents sent to the Council prior to it initiating its own consultation in March. That consultation showed 92.8% support for the existing site which was of absolutely no surprise to anyone. What a pity that time was ever wasted on the pointless exercise of looking for alternative locations.

Quite why the great news was kept a state secret until the Ward Committee on 3rd July beggars belief given the huge community and media interest. The meeting itself was a tortuous affair, yet again no written report was submitted and the announcement was made in the most low key manner imaginable. Gleaning information was akin to getting blood from a stone. Whilst you might not have expected a fanfare of trumpets and flashing lights the Council could have been rather more upbeat about it.

The Society first started campaigning about Harborne Pool and Fitness Centre in May 2002. As a result of our enquiries we were able in July 2004 to make the public aware of the shocking findings of the scientific investigations into the condition of the concrete pool tank [December 2002] and the opinion of the eminent consultant engineers, W. S Atkins, that the projected service life of the pool tank was November 2004. After two years of dithering and procrastination it is gratifying that at long last the case for a replacement pool on the existing site in Lordswood Road has been accepted at least locally. This is a big step forward. It is a victory for the local community. The Harborne Society thanks you all for your tremendous backing for our campaign. However, this is just the first battle ~ we still have to win the war.

The change in Cabinet Member for Leisure Services [now Councillor Ray Hassall] has inevitably clouded the issue but officers have had discussions with him and he has in



principle accepted that a case has been made locally for the scheme to advance to consideration of the business plan. We are heartened by this.

There is still a long way to go. Whilst the merits of the case are irrefutable, the Society has always recognised that securing funding will be the biggest obstacle and that the Council has to adhere to its own financial procedures. However, we are aware that since 2000 the Council has received significant capital receipts from the sale of land and properties in Harborne, possibly as much as £4 million, part of which could be earmarked for the project. There is also the possibility of using Section 106 funding arising from Planning Agreements for residential developments in the Edgbaston Constituency. On top of this, the Council is just embarking on an Asset Management Review of its Local Services property portfolio with the aim of securing further significant capital receipts to deliver new or improved Local Services outlets, which clearly could include the new swimming pool. And what about the Lottery and the Sports Council?

Genuine progress has been achieved and we are greatly encouraged by it. We now await the preparation of the business plan and the outcome of its consideration. With the political backing now committed locally we are optimistic of further progress but be assured that the Society will not relax and will continue to lead the campaign to secure our ultimate goal.

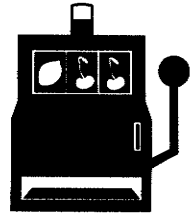
**Phil Stokes**



## Technical Officer's Report - Ann Yorke Technical Officer

The Society started in 1960 when the development issues with which Harborne was presented were of such immediate importance that we felt that only a concerted public effort would suffice to ensure that our environment was not blighted. Times have not changed a thing. However Planning law and the ferocity of determined contractors have served to decimate our village to a shadow of its former self despite our concerted efforts.

We have been descended upon by the hordes. Harborne is now the place where every contractor wants everyone to live and they are aided and abetted by Planning Officers who have no idea of the history of the village and care even less. Quite where all these people are supposed to park their cars or do their shopping has not been considered. A Retail Frontage Policy was adopted, and extended after our efforts, and is consistently ignored. Our most ancient buildings are to be demolished, the Moorpool Estate is being eroded by bad management, our shops are closing and, through the liberality of the Planning Department, becoming even more estate agencies, banks, betting shops and, lord help us, an amusement arcade.



Last Summer Phil and I updated the Society's tri annual survey of the retail units in the High Street. The results were even more depressing than previously, we now have less than 38% true retail units. Shortly afterwards an opportunity arose whereby a councillor, incidentally not one of ours, showed interest in this depletion of retail units. I sent the list to him and, on a flash of inspiration, also sent it to our own three councillors with a letter stating that the retailers were up in arms about the dire state of the High Street and demanded a public meeting. That very well attended meeting at Moorpool Hall is now history. We set out four or five principal items which needed tackling as a matter of urgency. We were promised a Town Centre Manager, the funding has in fact now been set up - and that is about all I can report. The Council held a badly mismanaged meeting at the Clock Tower when the public were asked for suggestions for the improvement of the High Street. Further to the analysis of these comments an outline report was written in which these comments were whittled down to perhaps half a dozen, none of which corresponded to our requests at last Summer's meeting. The draft report was published in July - nearly a year after the initial meeting. [See article on Local Centre Management Framework.]

We have always taken a proactive role in the Moorpool Estate and last year the Moorpool Residents' Association asked us for help with regard to having an Article 4 [2] Direction applied to the Estate. We were in the process of getting the Greenfield Road Conservation Area recognised and could therefore help them. Further to another public meeting, run by the Moorpool Residents' Association and well attended, they now have an active committee set up and working on the matter. Incidentally the Greenfield Road Conservation Area has now been ratified and will be in place in about 12 months.

South Street Methodist Church has been sold and will probably become even more residential units. It is a listed building so some care will have to be taken with the refurbishment and let us hope that the rear of the building will be demolished to provide adequate parking or South Street will become even more of a hazard to pram and wheelchair users.

The development of two storey side extensions seems to have abated slightly although neither the 'Places for Living' nor the 'Mature Suburbs Residential Guidelines' documents having either been officially adopted. However we are still getting more approvals than refusals to our letters of objection.

We have requested local listing for the Royalty as a fine example of thirties cinema architecture. What I would really like of course is for the Royalty to become a small cinema again but that is a pipe dream. I have heard nothing from the Conservation Officer. In fact the only time we have heard from the Conservation Officer is when he wrote to one of our members stating that the tearing up of front gardens for parking areas on the Moorpool Estate was 'within permitted development'. There has been an upturn in the fate of the Moorpool Estate recently in that Graingers are now taking an interest in retaining the character of the development. The Estate are having Centenary celebrations from 2007-2012 surely as good a reason as any to ensure the retention of this unique suburban estate?



However, within the Society we feel that we are making some progress, slowly admittedly, but progress of any sort after the changes which last few years have wrought, is a triumph. We have a much larger bulk of bureaucracy and faceless officers to deal with, often via the anonymity of an automated telephone system. Things are no longer as straightforward as persuading the Planning Officer to talk to us to discuss small local development issues. Although, to be fair, we are still advised of any new large applications and invited to meet with the architects and developers. As was the case with both the All Electric site and Princes Corner - quite how much notice was taken of our comments remains to be seen. Householder planning applications are proliferating with the poor state of the housing market causing people to refurbish rather than move but, again, little notice seems to have been taken, when decisions are reached by the Planning Officer, of the 'Places for Living' document which took so much effort to produce.

We do have adequate funding to fight important campaigns in a competent and professional manner and will continue to do so on your behalf. But we need more of you to come forward and help. We need your time if we are to make any changes to the manner in which our village is being eroded. The distribution of posters and leaflets is an onerous job in preparation for any large meeting. Phil finished up posting individual leaflets to every shop on the High Street prior to the public meeting at the Clock Tower, about the Town Centre Manager, on his own initiative. We need more, and accurate, e-mail addresses - I have a string of 'mail returned' notices in my inbox after every e-mail round robin - and we need more people to write letters of objection. Not to us, to the Planning Department. I have circulated, via the Newsletter, addresses and fax numbers but still I have people on the telephone asking for that very information. Help please.

And now, having been thoroughly downbeat, I would like to take this opportunity to thank my committee, Mary, Jenny, Phil, Peg and Derek for their hard work and enthusiasm during the last year.

## WELCOME BACK! THE START OF A NEW CHAPTER AT HARBORNE LIBRARY

Most of you will be aware that the greatly anticipated reopening of Harborne Library took place on Monday 10th July after a sneak preview on Harborne Carnival day. The reopening brings to a very happy conclusion the Society's campaign for the modernisation of the Library. It started on 29th January, 2000, with a letter to the Assistant Director of Leisure Services advancing the case for modernising the obsolete building and in particular action to deal with the physical access by infirm or disabled residents and also seeking the installation of a lift to the first floor.

To the City Council's credit, officers responded immediately in very positive terms. As suggested by the Society, the Council agreed as a first phase to convert the adjoining empty Council owned premises into a new street level entrance and reception area complete with Government funded computers for free internet access. That was eventually achieved in July 2002 but securing the rest of the scheme proved far more difficult, principally as a result of inadequate funding for the substantial works necessary to remodel what was originally a Masonic Hall built in 1879. It had been acquired by the Council for £2,000 and converted to a public lending library in 1892 as one of the concessions offered to Harborne ratepayers to "encourage" them to vote for annexation by Birmingham [1891].

Late in 2002 funding was confirmed to proceed with the next phases but largely self-inflicted delays and totally inadequate funding bedevilled the scheme. Extra funding was agreed in late 2003 but officers then incredibly decided to have a total rethink about the concept of the project. That re-think and attempts to secure more funding delayed matters for more than a year but in July 2005 funding was finally agreed. The Library closed on 10th September with planned reopening in April 2006 but unforeseen difficulties further delayed matters until July.

It has taken well over six years to secure our objective but the successful outcome has been worth the wait even though not everything we had hoped for has been provided, new double glazed windows being a notable deficiency. The new passenger lift ensures that for the first time ever all users will have complete access to all the facilities. These are baby changing facilities, a disabled person's toilet but, very surprisingly, no toilet for other users. There is also a new music CD collection to borrow. A final bonus is that the 'new' library will stay open at lunchtime. Late night opening has been switched to Thursdays.

There will be "teething troubles" and some work remains to be done but we congratulate the City Council for investing in Harborne and providing a library that supports the community's aspirations. The Society expresses particular appreciation to Library Services officers Geoff Mills and Dennis Lovatt for their unfailing commitment to the project. Welcome back to our much-missed library and to Hilary James and all her fantastic staff.

**Phil Stokes**



The Library opened its doors for a public preview on the day of Harborne Carnival July 2nd. The staff were delighted to be able to offer two storytelling and craft sessions for children attending the carnival.

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## QUEEN'S PARK ON THE UP?

The Society has long campaigned for a comprehensive scheme for the refurbishment and improvement of Queen's Park following many years of lack of investment and the piecemeal removal of facilities. The drainage system has collapsed entirely resulting in several areas of the Park being waterlogged and unusable, the main footpaths and car park are dangerously potholed and crumbling and only minimal play equipment and sports facilities are now available. The Park is desperately in need of major investment and loads of TLC.

Despite repeated representations we got absolutely nowhere. Over £70,000 [known as Section 106 funding] is available from the Planning Agreements for several residential developments in Harborne in recent years which has been specifically identified for improvements to Queen's Park and/or public open space in Harborne. It has always been the Society's view that this money should be used as a catalyst to attract additional funding from other sources, such as the lottery, to secure a comprehensive scheme in the absence of the Council ever using its own resources.

At last there is some very good news and hope of real progress. The Edgbaston Strategic Partnership has agreed, in the light of the Society's continuing representations, that one 'Key Action' in the Constituency Community Plan 2006/2010 will be to "Renovate Queen's Park". As a very modest start, six new benches and litter bins will very shortly be provided together with a number of the very rustic wooden plank benches and, hopefully, some seating for players using the three tennis courts [there used to be 9 courts!]. In addition, two new small flowerbeds are to be provided in the quiet area that was once the sensory garden for the blind. Not only that, separate investigations are to take place into the drainage problems, the resurfacing/repair of all the paths and car park and the provision of a children's play area. Not quite the comprehensive scheme that we have long pressed for but, nevertheless, a hugely welcome and appreciated step forward.

It is also intended that Grove Park will benefit from a major scheme for desilting the pool, repairing the banks and renewing the paths around the pool.

**Phil Stokes**



## HARBORNE LOCAL CENTRE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Last summer's Newsletter reported the results of the Society's survey of the High Street carried out on 1st June 2005. That survey provided worrying evidence of the continuing decline in the number and variety of retail outlets, so much so that retailing represented less than 47% of the High Street, 38% if hairdressers and opticians are excluded as not being shops in the generally accepted sense. We were so concerned that a public meeting was convened urgently [28th July] to discuss the issue and, despite short notice, Moorpool Hall was packed with concerned residents and traders. Our local councillors and M. P. also attended together with Council officers. The Council has limited powers to deal with every issue but there are measures that it could implement as well as being able to influence landlords, developers and other public agencies. We proposed a range of suggestions aimed at improving the vitality of High Street as a shopping centre. Our principal suggestions were for [1] a review of the Primary Retail Frontage Policy [which seeks to preclude planning consent for shops to change to non-retail uses] and [2] a comprehensive Action Plan, including the appointment of a Town Centre Manager. We asked for the Action Plan to be produced by the end of January 2006. We were assured that all of our ideas would be considered and Councillor Mike Whitby, Leader of the Council, promised that the principal suggestions referred to would be implemented. With such political backing we were confident that action would be initiated urgently.

Alas, we were to be disappointed. It took to the end of November for officers to present ideas as to how to proceed. A Harborne Centre Local Action Plan was proposed, to be prepared following input from the local community. We sought a two or even three-day event [including a Saturday] but the Council subsequently offered just one day with two 2-hour "drop-in" sessions on a Thursday. After we pressed the issue a third session was added. The Council failed to publicise the event and it was left to the Society to secure publicity in the 'Birmingham Mail' and on BBC Radio WM [Ed Doolan no less!] as well as putting up posters and writing to all businesses and traders. The event on the 19th January attracted over 150 people and 327 comments were eventually submitted. Officers analysed the comments to identify which issues could provide a focus for the Action Plan but it appears that ideas, including the suggestions made at the public meeting, would not be considered unless they are the Council's direct responsibility. Despite having asked the public to identify areas of concern, it is intended to sidetrack those that are "better dealt with by passing them to relevant officers for action".

The one positive redeeming feature is that the commitment to a Town Centre Manager has been confirmed and funding for one year from the Government's Neighbourhood Renewal Fund allocation was approved by the Ward Committee in March and steps to secure an appointment are in hand, although the title of the post is likely to change.

Since our survey the loss of retailing, particularly the independent traders, from High Street has continued. As expected, Manettes closed at the end of September 2005 but is to open in October as a 'Sainsbury's Local' store which will increase consumer choice. Fortunately, Elegusto, a specialist cheese, wine and delicatessen, opened next door in October 2005 but the adjacent Price's fishmongers has since closed without warning this June but, hopefully, might become a dress shop. Dreams bed chain



store opened in the former Allied Irish Bank premises in July 2005 but the Planning Committee then approved yet another change of use from a shop and Bottoms Up liquor store closed to become the Halifax Bank of Scotland in February 2006. The Halifax branch further up High Street consequently closed and is currently vacant. Birmingham Midshires building society, owned by the Halifax, also closed and is to open as a William Hill's betting shop right next door to Winners "adult gaming centre" that opened in June [retail premises granted change of use by the Council contrary to the Retail Frontage Policy and in the face of opposition from the Society and the Police]. Home Bargains chain store opened last November in the former Kwik Save premises that had been empty for twelve months. In January Harborne Cobblers opened next to Walter Smith but Fantasy Island toyshop closed in February and opened as Salados sandwich shop in May. McDonalds restaurant closed in March and the premises are currently "To Let". DM Associates property lettings opposite the bingo hall relocated to Albert Road at the end of March and the premises remain vacant. The long time vacant shop by the entrance to Attwood House was finally let and opened as Infinity fitted kitchens in June. Very sadly, right next door, Harborne Sports closed at the end of June ~ a family business lost after sixty years of service to our community. The closure of Durrants in Vivian Road at the end of March also saw the end of another long established local business which in its heyday as a radio, electrical and record shop had major premises on High Street for many years.

The draft Action Plan was published at the Ward Committee on 3rd July, virtually a year after the public meeting, but is now known as the 'Draft Harborne Local Centre Management Framework' in order "to avoid confusion with a traditional 'action plan' ". This is not a good omen.

The draft document was like the curate's egg ~ good in parts. It was strong on identifying possible environmental improvements yet was weak on grasping the strength of public concern about the decline in retailing and the loss of independent traders. This was reflected in a proposal that the review of the Retail Frontage policy should not happen until 2012. This policy is crucial to the future of the High Street and we are confident it will now be reviewed sooner. The Society has many comments to make on the document and has been assured that we will be consulted further by the Council before an amended document is submitted to the Ward Committee for adoption.

**Phil Stoke**

### HARBORNE RAILWAY SIGNAL BOX SIGN ~ Phil Stokes

When I visited the "new" Library on carnival day for a sneak preview I was amazed to discover that Harborne's most prized and most loved artefact from our historic past was not on display. I refer, of course, to the nameplate from the Harborne Railway signal box, which had for the last 12 years or so been on permanent display behind the main counter.

The nameplate is one of the very few relics of the infamous "Harborne Express". It was rescued by the late Mr. C. J. Williams, a local resident and British Railways Publicity Manager, in about 1963 when the railway finally closed as a result of Dr. Beeching's axe. He eventually looked for somewhere safe to ensure its preservation in Harborne and nowhere else. He approached the then Branch Librarian who was naturally thrilled to take the opportunity to assure Mr. Williams of the nameplate's safe keeping at the Library to be viewed by generations to come. The nameplate is unique, irreplaceable and priceless in local history terms.

At a time when interest in heritage issues has never been greater, it was astonishing that the nameplate was no longer on display. Consequently, we have urged the Council to be true to the spirit of what was effectively a permanent loan [not a gift] and to have the nameplate put back on permanent display as soon as possible.

If they did not wish to do so, the Society will willingly take possession of the nameplate for safekeeping. The matter is to be investigated and we are optimistic that this regrettable oversight will be rectified.



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## A FEW WORDS FROM OUR LOCAL POLICE TEAM

Welcome to a summer update from the Harborne Neighbourhood Policing Team. The team consists of myself Sergeant Neil Ogden and eight officers dedicated to dealing with crime and community issues within the area.

Harborne is part of the F2 Operational Command Unit that has recorded the lowest crime levels throughout the West Midlands area in the past 12 months. Harborne has also seen a 36% reduction in burglary offences in the past 12 months and during March and April this year no robberies were reported.

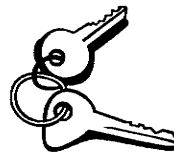
During the World Cup, we expected local pubs to be full of people watching the football. We worked closely with licensees carrying out additional patrols to ensure the football matches were enjoyed safely by the whole community.

Operation "Ventose" has been set up to address areas which are experiencing anti-social behaviour and this summer sees the introduction of officers patrolling the area on new Police pedal cycles.

Officers will be working closely within primary and secondary schools to give informative talks on a number of subjects, including "Good Citizenship" presentations and offering crime prevention advice. July saw the annual Harborne carnival and we were situated at our usual location at St John's Road.

**Should you wish to contact the Harborne Neighbourhood Policing Team, please call us at Rose Road Police Station on 0845 1135000.**

This month's crime prevention tip - as the weather gets warmer, we see houses being entered through open windows and doors when owners are in other parts of the home. We would encourage you all to ensure that windows and doors are closed and preferably locked when you are not in that room - it only takes seconds for someone to enter an insecure property and steal possessions.



**"Our vision is to reduce crime and anti social behaviour and make our communities feel safer"**

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## INTRODUCING KARIS NEIGHBOUR SCHEME

The Karis Neighbour Scheme (Registered Charity Number 1077200) was set up in April 1999 by doctors at the Karis Medical Centre who realised that many of their patients were finding it increasingly difficult to get help with practical tasks in their home, and others were experiencing isolation and loneliness. Karis Neighbour Scheme is based in Ladywood working into Edgbaston, Ladywood and Harborne. We seek to offer practical support, friendship and advocacy in the local community through volunteers. We aim to promote community links and address needs unmet by other organisations.

Our Elderly Empowerment Project is concentrated in the Harborne area.

For the last two years, we have supported many vulnerable and lonely elderly people. Some of our team of volunteers visit the isolated elderly in their homes for a chat over a cup of tea, whilst others offer their practical skills, for example painting, gardening and helping with small DIY chores. Where an elderly person needs help to regain confidence to go out a volunteer can visit with the purpose to accompany them to go out to the local shops for example. We act as advocates for those who need help to be heard and liaise with statutory services and other organisations. Karis Neighbour Scheme employs a Support Worker for the Elderly who recruits, trains and coordinates volunteers as well as visiting elderly people in the Harborne area.

However, the needs in Harborne continue to be great with recent figures stating that Harborne has the second highest percentages of lone pensioners in Birmingham and that 21.2% of the population in Harborne are over 60. Our work contributes to assisting elderly people to live independently in their own homes. As we look to the future, we are seeking ways in which this important work in Harborne can develop so that many more elderly people can receive friendship and practical support. If you are interested in our work or would like to volunteer please contact

**Helen Bell Elderly Support Worker**  
(0121) 455 7524 E-mail  
elderlysupport@  
karisneighbourscheme.org

## Chairman's Letter

Once again we present The Harborne Society's Summer Newsletter which is delivered free to all houses in Harborne by members of the Society. Fortunately we have a large membership, circa 800, but this does not mean that we do not want or need more. Our ultimate aim would be everyone living in, or with an interest in Harborne.

Harborne is our inheritance and our responsibility. Not only should we maintain but also improve it. We should all have a high level of concern for our environment. Looking after a village such as ours is a continual process.

What does the Harborne Society offer you? We provide ways of bringing the community together with our monthly meetings, our Heritage Day walk, an annual dinner, three newsletters a year, and our biennial Art Exhibition

But our most important role is to try our best to influence the way Harborne develops. We offer you information and seek your opinions. We aim to be a positive society rather than a negative one.

This year has been an especially busy one. We have had some successes, the Library in particular and hopefully the swimming baths, and we have influenced many large and small developments.

We are very concerned about the lack of retail shops. We shall soon be seeing new developments reaching Prince's Corner. These developments as well as providing residential apartments will provide more shop units. This is a wonderful opportunity to bring more retail units into Harborne. We must hope that the rents will not be too restrictive and that you, the residents of Harborne, will use these shops. We cannot complain about the loss of retail outlets if we do not use those we have or will have in the future.

We still know Harborne as 'the village' and it would be very sad if we lost this name. Harborne is a friendly place to live - long may it remain so.

**Yours sincerely, Mary. P. Abbott. Chairman**



Mary Abbott, Harborne Society Chairman, with her portrait at the Art Exhibition 2005

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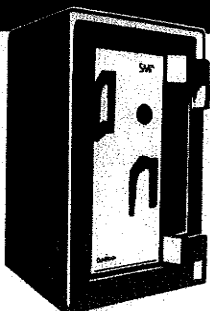
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*A local Harborne architect*

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## HARBORNE FARMERS' MARKET IS COMING! Phil Stokes



Fingers crossed, it's looking very likely that Harborne will have its own farmers' market starting in September.

Earlier this year the Council decided to promote enquiries about the possibility of establishing a regular farmers' market in Harborne and a steering group of interested parties, including the Society and the Traders' Association, has met several times to consider the way forward.

The matter is not as simple as it might seem, particularly if a quality market is to be held comparable with that at Moseley, voted the best farmers' market in the Midlands. Location is the most crucial factor and the forecourt in front of the main shops opposite the Clock Tower was agreed as being by far and away the best option. However, who should actually organise and operate the market? It is an extremely time consuming and responsible task as the experience at Moseley has readily demonstrated. That market and the one at Kings Norton are organised by an unpaid volunteer from the local community assisted by a large team of helpers on the day. The Council itself does not operate farmers' markets in the suburbs.

A farmers' market is highly desirable, would be widely welcomed and would be a major boost to the High Street. The Steering Group concluded that a volunteer organiser was extremely unlikely and consequently held discussions with E. G. Skett, a very experienced company that currently provides 15 farmers' markets throughout the Midlands, including Sutton Coldfield and Solihull. Those discussions went very well and, although certain operational issues still need to be resolved, it is expected that the company will very shortly agree to provide the market.

Initially, the farmers' market would run for a four-month trial period and be held on the second Saturday in the month from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. starting in September [the 9th] and continuing through to December. This is a great opportunity that Harborne simply cannot afford to miss but without your active support it will not succeed. Please don't let that happen!

### EDGBASTON STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

As one of the community representatives for Harborne Ward I have since the end of February attended six meetings of the Edgbaston Constituency Strategic Partnership or related sub groups and panels. The Partnership has been re-titled the 'ONE Edgbaston Partnership' which will "provide a more customised resonance in the context of developing an encompassing Edgbaston brand". [I know what you are thinking!]

Broad constituency-wide issues remain the principal areas of discussion, particularly the Edgbaston Community Plan 2006/10 that has now been finalised. This plan includes a number of specific pledges which include the High Street Christmas lights, appointment of a Town Centre Manager, possible farmers' market and confirmation of the site for Harborne Swimming Pool and the resource allocation all of which are referred to elsewhere in this Newsletter. Other pledges include reducing re-offending amongst younger people, establishing an older peoples' forum, setting up a 'ONEedgbaston.com' website, developing a comprehensive street services waste management strategy, introducing neighbourhood policing across the whole constituency and establishing a community resource base. Overseeing consideration of bids for the Government's Neighbourhood Renewal Fund allocations continues to be a significant role of the Partnership and an assessment panel met in May to make recommendations to the respective Ward Committee[s]

Phil Stokes

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## Charles Parker



At our AGM, after the serious business of the meeting is finished, we generally have some refreshments and a little 'entertainment' - in the form of a quiz. This year I put together a quiz about famous 'Harbornites' and was rather shocked to discover that even amongst our members there were some who had not heard of Charles Parker.

Our Society was instigated in 1960 at a public meeting in St John's Church Hall. This meeting was called in response to the many changes that were happening in Harborne. Concerned residents felt it was time that Harborne itself had a 'voice' to respond to the way that the 'village' was under threat of losing its unique identity. The Harborne Society grew out of this first massively well attended meeting and Charles Parker was our very first ever Chairman.

We should be very proud to have such an illustrious and innovative character as Chairman of the very first Harborne Society Committee. Charles Parker is someone of tremendous importance in the history of broadcasting, folksong, local theatre, oral history, and the radio documentary. He was born in Bournemouth and during the war years served in the Navy on submarines winning a Distinguished Service Cross. After the war he returned to his interrupted studies at Cambridge.

Getting a job was a very different story then and Parker writes that upon graduation in 1948, he approached the BBC in person saying 'I hear you're looking for bright young men?' and he, 'was in!' A bright young man he certainly was, and by 1958 he was working in Birmingham in the old Broadcasting House on Broad Street. Now the site of the Hyatt Hotel. He was sent from there to interview some railway men about the recent heroic death of one of their colleagues, one John Axon. His method was to record 'in the field' with his trusty BBC issue tape recorder, a real innovation in the 1950's, and from his 80 hours or so of recordings of the words of ordinary working men grew the first of his acclaimed Radio Ballads. These programmes were absolute cutting edge innovation blending folksong, narrative voice and sound effects. He anticipated, well before anyone else in the field, the importance of oral history and the value of the genuine word of the people. He worked with both Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger on these programmes and his espousal of Marxist principles, as with so many of his generation, coloured the issues that the 'Radio Ballads' embraced.

Perhaps the BBC were unsettled by his radical affiliations or were entering a period of 're-evaluation' but in 1972 he was offered redundancy from the BBC. Allegedly the BBC had decided to dispense with 'men in their 50's and replace them with men in their 20's, on short term contracts.' Does anything change?!

Charles Parker and his supporters and fans were less than happy with this, and it is extraordinary to sit in Central Reference Library looking through the Charles Parker Archive and see the massive amounts of correspondence that this unpopular decision generated in the mainstream daily newspapers. Is this a lesson to us now? Our daily papers are full of football, celebrities, and nonsense TV. Back in the 70's people were more concerned that a pioneer in the recording of the lives of working people was being short changed by a national institution. Our press show more concern for the sunglasses worn by footballer's girl friends!

From 1972 onwards Charles Parker only ever worked for the BBC in a freelance capacity, even though his first Radio Ballad broadcast in 1958 had been hailed by Robert Robinson in the Sunday Times as, 'as remarkable a piece of radio as I have ever listened to.'

After the BBC 'dispensed with his services' in 1972 (he was 53) he went on to found and develop the Banner Theatre in Birmingham. He also founded the Birmingham and Midland Folk Centre and from 1973 until his tragically early death in 1980 was a visiting lecturer in Media Studies at the Polytechnic of Central London.

During his time as a Harborne resident Charles Parker lived in Elmley Lodge and one wonders how he managed to fit in a concern for Harborne amongst all his other interests and commitments. As our first ever Chairman we should all be very grateful to him for helping to establish, on the back of that first ever meeting in 1960, our present thriving Society.

Charles Parker is not buried in St Peter's Churchyard, I was sorry to hear, but in rural Herefordshire in the village of Eye. Having read more about the man, his great enthusiasms and passionate convictions I would really have liked to have found his grave and left some flowers there in acknowledgment of his contribution to the



Charles Parker at his tape deck - photograph reproduced courtesy of the Radio Times

beginnings of our Society.

If you are interested in finding out more about Charles Parker his books, notes and a vast body of documentation on his life and work are kept in the Archives Department of Central Library on Floor 7. You may drop in any time and pick up a ticket for the County Archive Research Network - on display of the usual evidence of your name and address. This will entitle you to use of the archives. Some of you have no doubt already twirled up the spiral staircase that leads to the Archives Department at the very top of Central Library. Perhaps in pursuit of some branch of your family tree, or to dig out a long forgotten will, but I would encourage those of you who haven't, to investigate further. There are absolute riches within your reach!

The Harborne Society will be buying a collection of Charles Parker's Radio Ballads on CD to donate to the newly refurbished Harborne Library as a memorial to one of our outstanding founder members. We hope these will be available for borrowing soon.



Mary Worrall



## LISTED BUILDINGS - Ann Yorke

Birmingham's Listed Buildings range from the 12th century Church of St Laurence in Northfield to the Rotunda, which opened in 1965, and from cast iron Victorian public urinals to Aston Hall, one of the country's great Jacobean houses.

The City has approximately 2000 buildings listed for their architectural or historic interest, which vary enormously in character and age but all contribute to our unique heritage.

Listing a building under the Planning [Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas] Act 1990 gives it legal protection from demolition or unsuitable or inappropriate alterations which would destroy historic features or affect its character.

A listed building is a building or structure considered by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to be of special architectural or historic interest. Several factors will influence this decision, including the age or rarity of the building, technological innovation, architectural or historic associations. The council also keeps a 'Local List' of properties that it considers important to protect but which are not listed by the Secretary of State. These are graded A, B or C. [Alpha Tower is a Grade A]

There are 3 Grades of Listing:

Grade I - buildings of exceptional quality

Grade II\* - particularly important buildings

Grade II - the majority of the buildings listed as being of special interest

There are a number of Listed buildings in Harborne among which are:

The Clock Tower,

South Street Methodist Church,

Bell Cottage,

The Harborne Institute,

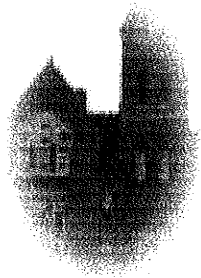
Metchley Abbey [Grade II\*],

David Cox Court,

35 - 39 York Street,

St Mary's RC Church Retreat

and the old railway bridge over Park Hill Road



In some areas of the City it is not just individual buildings which need to be preserved and protected. These areas are known as Conservation Areas

There will shortly be 3 Conservation Areas in Harborne:

Harborne Old Village [17 July 1969]

Moor Pool [30 July 1970]

and now Greenfield Road [2006].

The web site to visit for further information is:

[www.birmingham.gov.uk/buildingconservation](http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/buildingconservation)

*Sue Howells Art*

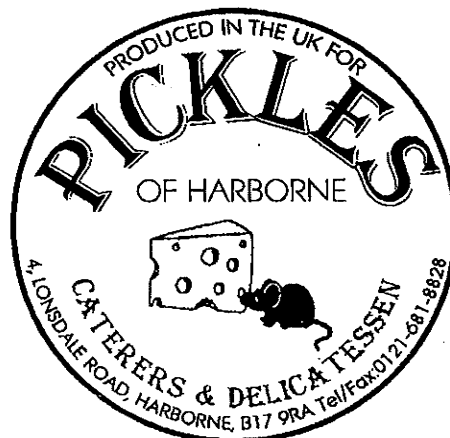
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## Other Business.

The Society felt that you may all be interested to know what 'Other Business' we are involved in as well as sitting on the Committee.

### Birmingham Conservation Trust

Eight years ago I was nominated to become a Trustee of the Birmingham Conservation Trust [BCT] to represent the Harborne Society. I suspect that there are very few of you who have not heard of, or even visited, the Back-to-Backs in Hurst Street. It took the BCT about 10 years to get that project off the ground. We raised nearly £2,000,000 for the work. We had just got all of the contracts and funding in place and were fretting about the number of visitors we would need, about 15,000 per annum, and who our market would be when the National Trust asked if they could come in on the project, fit the houses out and provide the guides. We fell on their necks with relief. There were 15,000 visitors in the first 4 months.

The Back-to-Backs is not our only project. The Brewmaster's House behind the ICC, two Victorian workshops in Lozells, The Hovel in Erdington, are among our completed projects. We usually bought the properties, raised the funding, did the works and then sold them on to get the funding for the next project. However we have such affection for the Back-to-Backs that we now have our offices there and hold our regular bi-monthly meetings in the reception area on Monday mornings.

We are at present looking at two further projects. Newmans Coffin Fitting Factory in Fleet Street and Evans the Silversmiths in Albion Street, both intrinsic parts of the Jewellery Quarter.

### Harborne Community Consultative Committee

I have been chairman of the Harborne Community Consultative Committee for about 5 years. This is commonly known as the Police Committee as it is where the police give their reports on the happenings in Harborne. The meeting follows on from the Harborne and West Edgbaston Neighbourhood Watch Committee meeting which I also attend. We meet about every two months and have had some dynamic Inspectors who are involved in community policing up to their eyebrows.

**Harborne Ward Committee Meetings**  
Mary Abbott, Phil Stokes, Jenny Buchan and I always attend these meetings. Recently other Committee members have

also attended. The meetings have grown from about half a dozen interested residents to about 25 with even more attending when a subject is of great local interest. It is at this meeting where anyone can raise matters which they want either sorted out or on which they wish to make a point. The Harborne Swimming Pool has been debated recently for instance.

### Moorpool Residents' Association Working Party

Late last year we put forward the idea to the Conservation Officer that the Moorpool Estate needed more than just Conservation status. The Moorpool Residents' Association asked for our assistance on how to do this as we had just got the Greenfield Road Conservation Area agreed. They held a well attended public meeting at Moorpool Hall and a working party was set up to further the proposal to have an Article 4[2] Direction added to the Conservation status of the estate. I put my name forward and attended the first meeting on 7th June. Much was discussed and to our great pleasure there were representatives from Graingers in attendance. They were full of enthusiasm and it appears that something will be done fairly soon.

### And so on.....

In addition to the above I inspect all of the planning applications for Harborne and write letters of objection, or praise sometimes, on those which we feel need comment. I also attend Planning Committee meetings and speak against various applications and have attended the Licensing Committee meeting for the same purpose.

I am on the Birmingham City Planning Control User and Review Forum and the Householder User Forum. I attend meetings once a month of either one or the other. I am also on the Birmingham City Council Building Consultancy Panel. We meet every three months.

And I work full time!

And on and on and on.....

Phil Stokes attends the bimonthly meetings of the **Edgbaston Constituency Committee** and serves on the **Edgbaston Strategic Partnership** as a community representative. He is also on the **Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector Network** and the **Edgbaston Community Empowerment Network**.

Mary Abbott attends the **F2 Police Consultative Committee** and is always being invited to attend receptions, such as Trees for Cities, where it is important that we keep a high profile. She has close connections with the Civic Society, as well as the **Quinton Police Consultative Committee** [a large part of Harborne falls in the Quinton Police operational area] and attends the **West Midlands Amenity Societies Association** meetings.

Recently we have kick started the Greenfield Road Conservation Area, lead the campaign for the appointment of a Town Centre Manager and are heavily involved with getting the Farmers' Market started.

So you see we do far more than sit round a table once a month; we have more roots entangled in the village than ever you dreamed of. Why not join us?

Ann Yorke - Technical Officer

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## REPORT OF THE A.G.M.

The 46th Annual General Meeting of the Society was held on 17th May, 2006, at Harborne Primary School with nearly fifty members in attendance, undeterred by the pouring rain.

Reports from the Chairman, Technical Officer and Honorary Treasurer presented a very clear indication of the very high level of activity during the year on behalf of members and the wider local community. The major issues had been the continuing pressures for residential development on back land and rear gardens, the completion of the modernisation of Harborne Library and the continuing decline of retail premises in High Street resulting in a public meeting being arranged by the Society culminating in the call for the City Council to prepare an Action Plan and to appoint a Town Centre Manager. However, the biggest issue by far remained the future of the Swimming Pool and Fitness Centre and the delay by the Council in grasping the nettle. Membership had increased and consequently the Society remained in an extremely sound financial position.

With the exception of John Tobias, all members of the Committee stood for re-election and in the absence of any further nominations they were re-elected, which leaves three vacancies. With well over 700 members there really ought not to be any problem in finding people willing to play an active role in the Society and to continue the work of the last forty six years. Please contact the Chairman if you are now willing to serve. The full list of Committee members and officers for 2006/2007 is on the back page of this Newsletter.

The brief formal meeting was followed by refreshments and an entertaining quiz based on the famous Harborne names ~ Barbara Higginson and Graham Parker were the prizewinners.

Phil Stokes



## GLAD TIDINGS!

The Ward Committee announced in January that it intends to have Christmas lights and decorations in High Street this year. Despite the best efforts of Elaine Cunningham and the Traders' Association in the past, funding has always been the stumbling block, with the national chain stores and businesses particularly reluctant to contribute. The Ward Committee has agreed to use £1,500 from the City Council's own funds for "festive decorations" together with up to £6,000 from the Government's Neighbourhood Renewal Fund allocation. An appeal has been made for financial support or sponsorship from traders and businesses in High Street. This initiative is very greatly welcomed and has long been sought by the Society and many residents. The Society is totally committed to supporting and promoting High Street as a shopping centre and has donated £500 towards the Christmas lights.

Phil Stokes

## HERITAGE DAY WALK ~ 10th SEPTEMBER

As usual the Society will be participating in the Heritage Open Days, co-ordinated by The Civic Trust and English Heritage, with another of Edward Chitham's hugely popular guided walks. Edward is devising a new walk based on 'Queen's Park and All points West'. The leisurely walk will take place on Sunday 10th September starting at 2 p.m. from the 'Court Oak' public house in Court Oak Road opposite St. Faith and St. Laurence Church. Please note that you must not use the pub car park ~ there is ample on-street parking in the immediate area, including Queen's Park Road, Balden Road and Croftdown Road. The walk should last about two hours. Whatever the weather, the walk will take place so be prepared for the worst! Everyone is welcome. Don't forget, Edward's widely acclaimed book '**Harborne: A History**' can be purchased from Harborne Library, Bonds Books and W. H. Smith.



Phil Stokes

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## Happy Second Birthday to our Harborne Society Webpage!

Our Harborne Society Webpage enters its second year and we are delighted to announce a steady increase in visits. The site now offers potential visitors an opportunity to make a 'virtual visit' to the High Street via several photo shots. In addition to these scenes of Harborne the website contains details of many of our local shops and businesses. Some of these shops have websites where you can buy on-line and our Harborne Society webpage provides hyperlinks where available. There are also links to other useful websites such as sports organisations, etc.

The webpage is updated every six months and it includes details of our social programme for the year. In addition it provides you with the contact details for the Society's committee members should you need to get in touch.

We would like to express our thanks to all the local shops and businesses which have supported the publication of this newsletter through advertising with us.

Please check out our website at [www.theharbornesociety.org.uk](http://www.theharbornesociety.org.uk) for in that way you will help to increase our visitor numbers and hopefully enjoy a look round the site at the same time!

Ray and Tricia Le Gallais

# SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2006

## OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE 2006-2007

### Patron

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### Chairman

Mary Abbott, 'Victoria Lodge',  
1 Victoria Road, B17 0AG.  
427 1378

### Vice-Chairman

Marcia Meyer,  
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427 4356

### Honorary Secretary

Phil Stokes,  
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426 1289

### Honorary Treasurer

Brenda Durbin,  
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427 3170

### Technical Officer/Chairman

#### Technical Sub-Committee

Ann Yorke,  
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604 7364

### Membership Secretary/Chairman

#### Social Sub-Committee

Jenny Buchan,  
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426 4854

### Newsletter Editor

Mary Worrall,  
91 Wood Lane, B17 9AY.  
426 6467

### Committee Members

Michael Darby	427 1916
Raymond Le Gallais	427 6887
Roger Miles	426 2577
Thelma Osbourne	
Andrew Peet	427 7923

If you wish to contact  
**The Harborne Society** to  
comment, or ask a  
question, on any local topic  
our email address is -  
harbornesociety@hotmail.com

## THE HARBORNE SOCIETY Programme of Meetings 2006-2007

### 2006

Sunday 10th September	Heritage Day Guided Walk led by Edward Chitham Centred on "Queen's Park and All Points West" Meet (but do not park) at Court Oak Pub at at 2pm
Wed 13th September	Magistrates in the Community - A magistrate
Tues 10th October	The Work of the Donkey Sanctuary Kevin Daly or other staff member
Wed 8th November	The Pitfalls of Public Art - Chris Upton
Tues 5th December	Swimming for Marbles - Chris Stockdale

### 2007

Tues 6th February	Experiences in Show Business - Mark Reynolds
Wed 14th March	Harborne Nature Reserve - Harborne's best kept secret - Derek Brown
Tues 17th April	The History and Revival of Enamels - Janice Proctor
Sunday 22nd April	Picnic in Harborne Nature Reserve For details contact Jenny Buchan
Wed 16th May	AGM

All meetings begin at 7-30pm. Tuesday meetings are held at Onneley House,  
Court Oak Road; Wednesday meetings are held in The Conference Room,  
Harborne Primary School, entrance in Wentworth Road.

In addition to the talks the meetings have a short business section so that members  
can be kept informed of local news and committee activities and also can raise  
issues of local concern.

We look to forward to seeing you.

Non-members are most welcome on payment of a fee of 50p.

## WARD COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Meetings of the Harborne Ward Committee have been fixed for the  
following Mondays ~ 16th or 30th October [to be determined] and  
27th November 2006 and 29th January, 26th March and 14th May  
[provisional]. Meetings start at 7 p.m. and are held at  
Harborne Primary School, Wentworth Road.

## THE HARBORNE SOCIETY

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