

HARPENDEN HOPPER

HBS Grant: £3,000

Harpenden Hopper celebrates ten years of community service

The Harpenden Hopper has marked a very special milestone: ten years of helping local people get out, stay connected and remain part of everyday life in the town. What began with two ageing minibuses and a small band of determined supporters has grown into a much-loved community service, now making more than 250 passenger journeys each week and firmly established in the fabric of Harpenden.

At the heart of that success is the team of volunteer drivers, whose commitment, patience and good humour keep the Hopper moving day after day. They do far more than drive a minibus: they welcome passengers by name, help people on and off safely, keep an eye out for regular travellers, and make each journey feel friendly and reassuring. For many passengers, the Hopper is not simply a way to reach the shops, appointments or social activities; it is a regular point of contact, conversation and companionship.



That contribution was warmly recognised at the Hopper's 10th anniversary celebration on Friday 3rd July at Park Hall in Leyton Road, Harpenden. The event brought together volunteer drivers, trustees, regular passengers, sponsors and invited dignitaries, including Dr John Howie, Deputy Lieutenant representing the Lord Lieutenant of Hertfordshire, Town Mayor Kirsti Wenn, Victoria Collins MP, and other Deputy Lieutenants Annie Brewster and David Williams. Speakers paid tribute to the service's achievements, its volunteers and the late Rosemary Farmer, who played an important part in its early story.

Victoria Collins MP also read the wording of an Early Day Motion congratulating the Harpenden Hopper on a decade of service, highlighting its role in combating loneliness, improving accessibility and reducing congestion.

The motion also recognised the work of the five trustees, 22 volunteer drivers and mechanic who make it possible to coordinate hundreds of weekly journeys.

One of the Hopper's regular passengers, Amanda, spoke from the heart about the service. She said, "I was extremely happy when it [the Hopper] ran daily as at the time I worked as a Carer for Nannies4Grannies and I relied on the Hopper to get me around Harpenden. From the start, there was a wonderful community feel about it. I even volunteered to look after a fellow passenger's cat whilst she went on holiday!

I became ill with heart and lung failure and thought all was over but realised I could still use the Hopper with the help of the fantastic drivers - the bus gave me a new lease of life; it has opened up my world.

I have made wonderful friends with fellow passengers and drivers alike, especially a close friendship with another passenger - the two of us get out on the bus as much as possible, in fact we plan our outings and lives around the Hopper timetable, especially our monthly lunches at The Plough & Harrow in Southdown. In fact, it is an 'in joke' on the bus with other passengers who try to guess where we are off to next!

I personally want to say thank you to everyone on the Hopper, for everything you do, for the wonderful service you provide and for all your kindness shown, not only to me but to all that board the bus. Thank you for everything, thank you for being my lifeline".

The continued growth in passenger journeys shows just how important the service has become. As more residents use the Hopper, the passenger community has grown too, with familiar faces, new friendships and a shared appreciation of the volunteers who make each trip possible. The volunteer team is also deeply grateful for the financial support provided by Harpenden Building Society, whose backing helps sustain this valued local service and its day-to-day contribution to community life.

The celebrations continued throughout the summer with the annual Hopper passengers' tea party which took place on Wednesday 19th August, in the garden of St Nicholas' church hall at Cornelia's coffee shop. All Hopper passengers were invited, and the much-loved selection of home-made cakes went down a treat. As always it was another happy opportunity for passengers, drivers and friends of the service to come together, ideally arriving, of course, by Hopper.

"We are proud to have kept the Hopper running for ten years, but most of all we are grateful to our passengers, supporters and sponsors for making it such a warm and valued part of community life. Every journey reminds us why this service matters".

Hopper volunteer team

The Harpenden Hopper volunteer team



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10 YEARS