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Re Purwell Meadows Green Space Action Plan Consultation

Dear Paul,

Thank you for inviting Hitchin Forum to contribute to the first stage of the consultation on the proposed GAP. It is very encouraging that CMS and NHDC have adopted the two stage model of consultation on recent GAPs. The initial invitation to stakeholders, the walk round following the publication of the outline briefing document, and before commitment to specific actions, is very helpful. It was a shame that more did not attend the walk round – I found it very informative, and the depth of knowledge of the area of those attending was impressive.

Overall, Hitchin Forum supports the three objectives in the briefing document. From a layman's perspective, the steps outlined to protect and enhance biodiversity seem logical. Temporary fencing to protect the river from cattle and therefore improve the quality of the river bank has already been effective in the limited area in which it has been tried. It would therefore be a good idea to extend the use of this technique.

The briefing document makes clear that no self-sustaining volunteer group emerged following the previous GAP. Those of us who are members of voluntary groups are well aware of the difficulties here. Hitchin Forum's experience is that particularly people in full time work, are understandably unwilling to make long term commitments. However, given a framework, momentum can build for one-off events which involve a wider range of people than group members. The Forum has been successful in organising a twice yearly clean-up of the town which involves a wide cross-section of residents, and particularly children – our last clean-up attracted about 100 volunteers. Schools have been willing to encourage children and parents to get involved. An approach to local primary schools in particular could be considered in this respect – in the short term, providing a potential group of volunteers, and longer term, a lasting interest on the part of young people. The potential of educational visits by local schools to carry out simple field work could also be explored, although the obligation on schools to produce risk assessments for such activities, coupled with the imperative to fit the activity within a wider, imposed, curriculum framework, can be a disincentive.

Beyond the immediate confines of the greenspace, by the use of suitable signposting, Purwell Meadows could be part of a largely green corridor footpath route giving an alternative to the HOOP. This would extend from bridleway 18 / FP26 junction at Ickleford in the north to the junction of bridleway 94 with Hitchin / Wymondley Road in the south.

I look forward to the publication of the draft Action Plan and will be happy to comment further during the second consultation phase.

Kind regards,

Bill Sellicks (Chairman)