

# HITCHIN FORUM

Caring for our Town

## Hitchin Forum News & Notes June 2020

At the end of May, we would normally have sent out our usual Newsletter. However, a physical copy would be logistically difficult to arrange, and there is little in the way of hard news on local issues. Therefore Steering Group, in its second virtual meeting, decided to send out this email to let you know that we are still keeping an eye on things where possible. We have also decided to offer members the opportunity to contribute ideas to a future circular in which we consider what the post-lockdown future might be like for Hitchin, which could inform Hitchin Forum's future agenda.

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A consequence of the good weather is that those who choose to do so can get out into the local countryside. After the initial stages of lockdown, during which Derbyshire Constabulary in particular made significant public relations blunders (I'm pretty sure that their drone would have been impounded had it been the property of a private individual – Curbar Edge is a 'no drone fly zone' I believe) police guidance made it clear that short drives for exercise were acceptable provided that the time spent exercising was longer than the drive. Some of us have been taking advantage of this, especially since using local footpaths, many of which are narrow, made social distancing hard. The use of much broader bridleways and access land avoids the problem, especially early in the morning. More recently, the possibility of doing as much exercise as you like and the removal of travel restrictions has made it possible to range further afield, especially by bike. Certain things become noticeable – many have commented on hearing bird song clearly and cleaner air. Sadly, fly-tipping has increased, but I have been impressed by NHDC / Urbaser's response. The pictures below show a fly-tip I reported at the Treasure's Grove car park on the road from Hexton to Lilley, and the excellent result after it had been cleared.



More recently, I photographed this bag of old roofing felt in Luton Whitehill near Offley.



As I was putting my camera away, Urbaser / NHDC's truck hove into view and two friendly operatives proceeded to remove it, saving me a job in the process.

Sadly, there are significant issues that will take longer to deal with. The area near the eastern end of the runway at Luton airport, normally somewhere I would not linger for fear of damaging my already impaired hearing, is now tranquil and very attractive. It is, unfortunately, subject to the attention of fly-tippers on an industrial scale. One tip, a collection of many plastic bags, building waste, old mattresses, furniture and baby buggies blights a good 40 yards of the verge of Limekiln Wood near Diamond End. I have reported it, but it will take a large team several hours to clear, and I suspect will still be there for some time.

Talking of the airport, the latest Newsletter from London Luton Airport Town and Village Community Committee (LLATVC) is available – <https://tinyurl.com/y736alzv> - which will provide a lot of details of the latest position with regard to Luton airport's attempt to relax noise condition 20 and its plans to increase passenger numbers to 32million each year. I am sure that LLATVC would want me to apologise for that fact that the attachment appears to be a not quite final draft! Perhaps we should lend them one of our eagle-eyed proof readers who is often responsible for the very high standard of grammar and expression, not to mention avoidance of faux pas, in our usual Newsletters.

There has been much publicity around cycling in the last few weeks and the announcement by the Secretary of State for Transport on 9<sup>th</sup> May that significant funding will be available to local authorities has to be good news. I understand that Councillors and Officers at both Hertfordshire County Council and North Hertfordshire District Council are in the process of finding out how to access the funds. I do hope that there will be thought given to cyclist education so that the experience is positive for everybody and the possession of certain types and makes of bikes does not become a similar macho status symbol to the fast car.

The cycling revolution is already happening. On my early morning walk each day, it is routine to see more cyclists than walkers, and, most encouragingly, one who pushed his bike along a footpath trying to avoid traffic when linking two bridleways. If I go out cycling, I currently pass many more cyclists than motorists in the country lanes. There is a good spirit of camaraderie, and I have not come across the sort of arrogant cyclist behavior one encounters in some places. Some simple rules help – the Greenway has listed some, including that cyclists have and use bells, which is appreciated by walkers and runners.

*Bill Sellicks*

## **Members' thoughts on post-lockdown Hitchin - a call for contributions**

For reasons that you will readily understand, it has been difficult to identify topics for articles in a current Newsletter using the standard format. As a temporary but nevertheless positive alternative we invite you to share with other members, in a 'publication' that reflects the times, your thoughts on the challenges and opportunities that will occur in the Hitchin locality as part of the 'new normal'. It is inevitable that many of these will also be national issues and we ask you, as well as recognising that this is so, to focus on the relevance for Hitchin in keeping with the aims of the Forum.

We suggest that written contributions should be a maximum of 200 words, much shorter than the 'normal' article length. We will thus need a good number of contributions for the experiment to be viable. We also invite contributions made in other formats apart from the written.

In sending your ideas please bear in mind that contributions:

- should have relevance to Hitchin
- are a maximum of 200 words if in written form
- may be different forms of communication, such as a photograph or piece of art work or spoken, although these will need to equate in rough terms to 200 words
- may include humour if you wish!

We will publish contributions in a future email, and possibly on the Forum's website. As with the 'Our town, Your say' Newsletter feature, we will not use material which is party political, offensive or in conflict with Hitchin Forum's aims and objectives. Steering Group will be the final arbiter on the acceptability of any contribution. We hope that by sharing your thoughts we may assist the Forum's direction of travel.

Naturally you will wish to submit your own ideas but the following may help to get you started:

- How can Hitchin Town Centre survive and prosper given the dramatic changes that are occurring in shopping habits?
- Are there ways in which priority can be given to pedestrians and cyclists in a future Hitchin (specific examples helpful)
- How can our community improve care for the lonely and disadvantaged?

- How can the public transport infrastructure be improved?
- What can be done to help employment prospects in the area given the dire forecasts that are currently emerging at national level?
- What are the new/updated concerns about Health and Safety in the community and what can we do as residents to help?
- How can science help in formulating local policy and influence practice?

We are happy to accept photographs, art work or spoken communication.

We look forward to hearing from you. Please send your contributions to our Newsletter Editor, Jennifer Piggott (jsp38@cam.ac.uk) in the first instance, by the end of June.

*Jennifer Piggott and Brian Sykes*

### **Planning Concerns.**

As usual we have been looking at planning applications submitted over recent months, most of which are acceptable. However we have objected to two of these. First, North Hertfordshire College are proposing a new sports hall and floodlit pitch plus a residential site of 116 dwellings. Second, two five storey residential blocks are proposed on the Garrison Court garage site to the rear of Woodcote House.

#### **North Hertfordshire College application 20/00073/FP**

Our concerns are about the proposed housing development rather than the sports facilities.

First, we believe there should be an additional entrance/exit to the development. The proposal indicates a long and unappealing cul-de-sac from St Michael's Road and past the college to the residential site. We are suggesting an extra road which bridges the Purwell and joins Chaucer Way. This would reduce the congestion into St Michael's Road/Cambridge Road for those wishing to travel to Letchworth Garden City and further east.

Second, NHDC has declared a Climate Emergency so the planning department ought to insist on the highest standard of energy saving efficiency such as solar panels, heat pumps, passive house standard insulation, water harvesting and electric vehicle charging points.

Third, we believe the design style of the residential properties to be both too traditional and bland. There are examples of visually more up to date appropriate housing in Hitchin. This site offers a good opportunity for these considerations to be taken into account.

## **Garrison Court Freeholders Ltd application 20/00750/FP**

We think this is a visually inappropriate proposal which is unsympathetic to its surroundings and is crammed in a very confined site. This together with its 5 storey height will dominate the area causing problems to the existing residents of Garrison Court, Woodcote House and Balliol Chambers as follows. Loss of privacy due to overlooking, loss of light due to shadowing in various directions during the day and loss of views. This last point also affects the public's views to and from Windmill Hill obstructing the important view of St Mary's Church. As such it will have a detrimental effect on the quality of life of the surrounding neighbours and become a visually damaging insert to this area of Hitchin. The applicant states that Woodcote House is four storeys high but neglects to point out that it is on lower ground, thus the proposal is at least 1.5 storeys higher.

It is proposed to demolish 19 garages and usurp 9 car parking spaces at present used by local residents. Access to these parking places is via a restricted way from Hollow Lane and across a proposed communal patio providing only one car parking space for each new resident. The proposed provision of bin storage, to be shared by Garrison Court, is inadequate for the increased number of users.

In conclusion Hitchin Forum is totally opposed to this grey, over height, morbid design and recommends that it be rejected.

NHDC Planning has not made a decision on either of these applications to date.

*Chris Honey*

