



NEWSLETTER

July-August 2020 No. 158

Thoughts from the Chair

There is plenty to chew on in this newsletter – all of it is calorie free so totally in line with the PM’s anti-obesity drive. I had some of this in mind when I tuned into our Councillors’ Surgery on August 1st. They have retreated, sensibly, from Market Place to Zoom Place. Given the noise and bustle in Market Place with the (excellent) al fresco catering arrangements it was easier to make oneself heard, especially as I was the only public attendee at the time. Ten councillors to myself! What use could I make of this time? It did seem an excellent opportunity to discuss issues – cycling in town, fly tipping, eastern access to the station, highways fault reporting (just email Cllr Derrick Ashley if nothing happens), whatever.... It is clear that the councils are working hard on much of this. I didn’t get around to the prospect of a Herts Unitary Authority and a possible Town Council – but Keith Hoskins deals with this a few pages on.

I did forget to raise the issue of a 20mph zone for the whole of Hitchin. Cycling and walking are topical, even becoming the topic in a recent ‘Thought for the Day’ on Radio 4. They tick the boxes for health and environmental improvement. Bike shops have been inundated for repairs and are sold out of new bikes.

A draft proposal for a revision of the Highway Code is out for consultation (<https://tinyurl.com/y2qpynfk>). The Campaign for Better Transport, Cycling UK, Living Streets and other groups have been campaigning for such changes. The County Council is looking for ways to support the drive for healthier transport options but making concrete (or tarmac) proposals gets hard.

Widen My Path (<https://www.widenmypath.com>) seeks to find local workable changes to the road system and a better deal for walkers and cyclists. But how do you change the narrow roads in a town that follow the patterns of old cart tracks? The Dutch have pioneered ways to make cycling safer and I like the idea of shared spaces for walkers and cyclists (shared pavements are ok as long as people respect other users). I read that problems are occurring in the Netherlands with the introduction of e-bikes – too easy to go too fast, and impacts get more serious with the weightier vehicle. And maybe not all engineering solutions do work. I watched a ‘Look East’ news report on a Dutch style roundabout in Cambridge. It is designed with an outer orbital path for bikes to keep them away from the cars, but there are several intersections where cars and bikes meet. It seems it was at an accident blackspot, but I wonder how much that will improve, and whether the £2.3m has been well spent.

And back to 20mph – Hertfordshire County Council has recently published an updated Speed Strategy, with a consultation, open until September 16th (<https://tinyurl.com/ya5c4r6w>). It is a long document and has a lot of interesting thoughts. It describes a ‘Place and Movement’ approach – designing speeds appropriate to an area’s local traffic, both motorised and ‘active’, i.e. walking and cycling. To me it seems to offer a better way forward for lower speed limits in town, and a strategy to lower limits on winding country roads (ever felt scared on the B655 towards Barton?). The online consultation is simple and easy to respond to – do have a look and lend them your thoughts.

Mike Clarke
Co-chair

Hitchin Forum Annual General Meeting

The AGM of Hitchin Forum has been held every year around October or November. As required for any AGM, it is an open meeting for all members, when the annual business of the organisation and its Constitution is discussed, a Chairman's report is given, a financial report supplied, and the members of the Steering Group are elected.

This year presents something of a problem, because as things currently stand it seems unlikely that the coronavirus situation will improve to an extent where a group of 20 or 30 may meet for such an occasion. The situation is of course constantly evolving, but even if government advice permits such a meeting, it seems likely that members may be reluctant to expose themselves to what may be perceived as a potential risk.

Steering Group has therefore been considering what alternative action may be taken with regard to this year's AGM. Members will be kept fully informed of any decision made, but in practice, it has seemed that those offering themselves as members of the Steering Group have usually been voted in unanimously by those present. Whilst it would be wrong to be complacent about this, it may be that the willingness of current members to stand again may offer a solution on a "one-off" basis. However, we will certainly leave open opportunities for other members to be nominated. No final decision has yet been made, but Steering Group may consider that the AGM could be dealt with this year as an email (or letter to those without internet access) containing the Chairman's statement, the financial report, and details of those offering themselves for the Group.

Clearly this is less than ideal, but in the circumstances, it may be the best way forward in this difficult year. Further information regarding a final decision will be supplied in due course, but if any member has a strong objection to this suggestion, or has an alternative proposal, we would be grateful to hear from them.

Andrew Wearmouth
Member of Steering Group

Roads to Nowhere

During lockdown, North Hertfordshire's footpaths and bridleways became very popular. I often took the opportunity to speak to some of those who decided to explore our local countryside, sometimes for the first time. Some were seasoned walkers who had travelled from other areas, but quite a few were clearly local. Some of the latter had taken to the countryside because they did not think urban footpaths, or footpaths in areas like Oughtonhead, provided sufficient room for social distancing during their daily exercise. A few were lost and welcomed being pointed in the right direction. Many were using maps printed from various online sources, such as the Chiltern Society or the Ramblers, which they did not always interpret correctly. They all seemed to be enjoying themselves, but why had the locals not explored our network of rights of way through our glorious countryside before?

Some tracks are rarely used, even during lockdown, and deserve to be better known. Of these, two almost parallel bridleways descend north east from Birkitt Hill, just north of the A505 near Great Offley. Both have wonderful views, and are havens for wildlife, with hedgerows full of small birds and wonderful wild flowers. Skylarks, kites, buzzards and kestrels are frequently seen overhead. A third bridleway starts about 30 yards from the point at which the slip-road from Great Offley meets the A505. This ends on Carter's Lane near Offley Bottom Farm. At this point, for walkers, there is a choice of two onward paths. One leads them up to a fine, recently-replaced gate opening onto the B655. The other leads towards the A505, which it meets opposite the turning into Willow Lane (of which more later). Cyclists arriving at the same point face the equally unpalatable options of turning right along Carter's Lane to the A505, or left towards the B655. A fourth bridleway, this time from the Ickleford direction, continues the line of Westmill Lane, delivering the walker or cyclist to the B655 south of High Down House.

Of these four bridleways, three deposit the walker or cyclist directly onto the B655 with no onward route, except to follow the road. The B655 is a very busy road used by drivers as part of a rat-run between the A1(M) and the M1. It is relatively narrow for the most part, often with lengthy winding sections. The national speed limit applies beyond the outskirts of Hitchin to the border with Bedfordshire, but there is only one straight section along which 60mph even approaches being appropriate. The danger of the bends is compounded by high hedges or wooded verges with no refuge for vulnerable road users (unless they are prepared to be scratched or stung – I speak from experience). There is no signage to warn drivers of the possible presence of walkers or cyclists near any of these rights of way. There have been a number of fatal collisions, and I have seen at least two vehicles embedded in hedges on frosty mornings. Although the road is used by cyclists, for the most part such cyclists are confident riders, often in groups, equipped with high-visibility jackets and intense flashing rear lights. I would describe myself as a confident cyclist, but in the thirty-six years I have lived in Hitchin, I have cycled only very short distances along the road, and generally try to avoid it.

In a situation in which less experienced walkers or cyclists without a map are tempted to use these attractive rural bridleways, perhaps assuming that they will be able to travel from Offley to Hitchin, or from Ickleford to the Old Wellbury area, the B655 forms a dangerous and often terrifying barrier to what might otherwise be a delightful experience. Although these routes are bridleways, I have never seen a horse rider on three of them. During lockdown I have seen five people walking along the B655, all in serious danger. Three were unaccompanied children. Of the adults, one was walking towards a left-hand bend on the left-hand side of the road, unable to see the traffic approaching from behind.

These are not the only rights of way that take the walker or cyclist to a dangerous road with no safe onward route. The A505 is a disaster. The footpath to which I referred earlier has no provision to allow walkers to easily cross it to reach a path on the opposite side of the road. The picture below shows how difficult it is for a walker to cross either carriageway safely.



This is the first of no fewer than five rights of way severed or terminated by the A505 between Hitchin and the Luton boundary. Hoars Lane (a bridleway) emerges onto the westbound carriageway opposite Carter's Lane at a point where approaching (Luton bound) traffic has just negotiated a left-hand bend without any warning of the likelihood of the presence of walkers or cyclists. In fact, of the five rights of way, motorists are warned of the presence of walkers in only one case.

I hope that in detailing some of the problems associated with two of Hitchin's busy main roads, I have demonstrated that, for far too long, the needs of walkers, cyclists and horse riders have been totally neglected by comparison with the perceived needs of motorists. Funding for cycling in particular has been trumpeted by national politicians during the last few weeks as never before. If the County and District Councils are serious about prioritising the needs of walkers and cyclists above those of motorists, attention needs to be given to making such routes safe.

A relatively cheap way to do this in the context of the B655 would be to reduce hedgerow widths and provide cut verges linking paths and bridleways. Motorists need to be warned of the possible presence of walkers and cyclists, and speed limits should be reviewed with the protection of vulnerable road users in mind. This is not unrealistic - a verge path has been created for a short section of the B655 near to the Bedfordshire border to connect two sections of the Icknield Way, and a much less busy stretch of a nearby road between Hexton and Lilley (again on the Icknield Way), south of the Treasures Grove car park, also has a verge path. A similar path was created by Hertfordshire's Rights of Way Unit and the Countryside Management Service to link two sections of the Hitchin HOOP between the Wymondley Road / St Michael's Road roundabout and Gypsy Lane at Coots Corner a few years ago. That took a considerable effort by the then Countryside Access Officer, Nicholas Maddex, who cobbled together funding from a variety of sources over quite a long time to implement the plan.

I hope that the current political vogue to prioritise the needs of walkers and cyclists will prove genuine, and we see the creation of a proper network of off-road routes so that everybody can enjoy more of our local countryside without having to run the gauntlet of fast-moving traffic.

Bill Sellicks
Co-Chair

Our Town. Your Say

The contributions to this issue both come from Keith Hoskins (Councillor and former Town Centre Manager). We would like to remind members that the views expressed in this feature are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of Steering Group or the Forum as a whole.

If you wish to contribute, please email the editor at: newsletter@hitchinforum.co.uk.

Local Government Reform

Simon Clarke, Minister of State for Regional Growth and Local Government will be introducing a Devolution White Paper in September intending to strengthen local institutions with the establishment of more Unitary councils. This was announced in the Queen's Speech last October and reconfirmed in December after the General Election (was that only 8 months ago?? Seems a lifetime!).

Quick off the mark in November, or with remarkable prescience, HCC commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers to prepare a report on 'Local Government Reform in Hertfordshire 2020'. Their 71 pages were published in February and can be viewed on the HCC website. In summary, they listed 3 options:

- 1) Optimise the existing 2-tier collaboration focusing on agreed areas such as waste, customer contact and back-office support.**
- 2) A single Unitary Council based on the existing County boundary with a 1.2 million electorate.**
- 3) Two Unitary Councils each of 600,000 comprising**
 - a) Dacorum, Hertsmere, St Albans, Three Rivers and Watford,
 - b) Broxbourne, East Herts, North Herts, Stevenage and Welwyn & Hatfield.

The aims of Unitaries would be to achieve improved outcomes and services; provide value for money; improve efficiency by removing duplication and so effecting cost savings; establish strong and more accountable leadership and create immediate and long-term sustainability.

Currently, we operate the 2-tier system with a County Council and 10 District Councils making a total of 526 elected Councillors, each receiving allowances according to their role. Many areas also have Town or Parish or Community Councils with elected, but voluntary, representatives who receive no allowance. So, in effect, three tiers in some areas. Political control is predominantly Conservative – County Council is 50 Conservative, 18 LibDem, 9 Labour and 1 Independent; the District Councils combined have 214 Conservative, 133 LibDem and 95 Labour. In North Hertfordshire 6 District Councillors are also County Councillors. Three Rivers and Watford Councils are LibDem controlled; St Albans is run by a LibDem minority; Stevenage has a Labour Council and North Herts is run by a joint Labour/LibDem administration. The rest are Conservative.

David Williams, the Leader of the County Council expects to see the end of 2-tier local government during this parliament, i.e. in the next 4 years, and believes that becoming Unitary will be a pre-requisite for devolved powers from central government. Unsurprisingly, it would appear that he seems to favour a single Unitary.

Well that's all the official blurb, so where does that leave us? As many of you know, I have long supported the creation of a strong Town/Community Council for Hitchin. This would respond to the aspirations of local people and build on the terrific spirit that exists here, with a Unitary Council to deal with the big-ticket items that are currently the responsibility of the County Council. However, I believe that the size of Hertfordshire precludes a single Unitary so I would be supportive of Option 3. BUT, the strong Town/Community Councils need to be in place a.s.a.p. ready to deliver devolved services, including those from a dissolved District Council, if David Williams' timescale is to be achieved. The ten Districts, regardless of political affinity, have also come out against a single Unitary. Some of them want the status quo, others like North Herts are open-minded.

The last reorganisation of local government was in 1974 and since then technology has enabled faster communication 24/7 – web-conferencing has become a way of life! Let's get our strong Town Council in place before we get bounced into something that the town is not prepared for. And finally, if we reorganise, can we press for our local government electoral system to be the same as Scotland and Northern Ireland, or the same as for Mayors and Police & Crime Commissioners. First past the post is now only for the House of Commons and English & Welsh Councils – so outdated, even the House of Lords elects its hereditary peers and its Lord Speaker by Alternative Vote and the House of Commons Deputy Speakers by Single Transferable Vote so it can't be that difficult!

Catching the Train

The benefits of web-conferencing were amply demonstrated on Friday 24th July when Officers from Hertfordshire County Council and North Hertfordshire District Council were able to get together with representatives of Network Rail, Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) along with Bim Afolami MP, District Councillors Paul Clark, Keith Hoskins, Ian Albert and County & District Councillor Judi Billing to discuss improving access to the eastern side of Hitchin Train Station.

The project could provide a new entrance to allow commuters to more easily access the London-bound platform. Some early work has been carried out on possible options by Hertfordshire County Council, and further detailed investigation is now required on the feasibility of these.

Everybody who is part of this working group is committed to collectively moving the project forward. We have agreed to meet again in September in order to continue to do that.

Keith Hoskins

North Herts District Council Draft Local Plan - Update

As members will be aware, the Local Plan for the North Herts District has not yet been approved and remains in draft form. Mr Simon Berkeley, the appointed Inspector, received many submissions from the public with regard to it, and held public hearings between November 2017 and March 2018 (the "Examination in Public"). These hearings raised many questions and following them he asked the Council for further clarification. The Council's responses were made public, and the Inspector then invited the various Respondents to comment further. This raised a number of issues which he considered unresolved. Among these issues was the emphasis that should be given to the importance of the district's Green Belt (areas of which had been identified for development), and whether the Local Plan took sufficient account of the revised (and much reduced) housing needs figures from the Office of National Statistics.

Mr Berkeley decided that these outstanding issues warranted further public hearings, and he arranged these for March this year. However, the then emerging situation with regard to the coronavirus pandemic meant they could not proceed in public, and he therefore postponed them to a later date. As time has passed and there is a greater awareness of the need for public meetings to be avoided, revised dates for the hearings have not yet been offered.

The Local Plan is intended to be for the twenty year period from 2011 until 2031, and of course we are already halfway through that! This does give rise to a risk to the district. One purpose of the Local Plan is to identify which areas of land are considered suitable for development during the life of the Plan, which then acts as a defence against applications on alternative sites which would otherwise be considered unsuitable. In its absence therefore, there is little protection against planning applications being made for such other areas, which may then have a presumption in favour of approval.

Whilst the questions which have been raised against the draft Plan are entirely correct and valid (and need to be resolved), it is important that the Plan, in whatever amended form, should eventually be confirmed. Steering Group therefore wrote on 25th May to the Programme Officer for the Inspector, asking whether he was now able to give any indication of how he proposed to take the matter forward.

On 27th May, the Officer replied saying that it was not possible to give any further information about when or how the postponed sessions are likely to take place. She confirmed that as soon as the Inspector had decided on how the Examination should proceed, she would be in touch with all interested parties (registered Respondents) to give an update, and will post that update on the Council's website.

The difficult position that the Inspector finds himself in is understood, but equally, the lack of a Local Plan is a matter of serious concern. Quite how the recent Government announcement of an overhaul of the planning system to streamline, simplify and speed up development will affect the progress of a Local Plan for North Hertfordshire is an unknown. Steering Group intends to keep alert to any changes in the situation and will let members know as soon as there is anything to report.

Andrew Wearmouth
Member of Steering Group

Autumn Clean-up

You will remember that we set a provisional date of Sunday October 18th for our autumn clean-up. At the time of writing, we are waiting to hear from NHDC whether they are happy for us to go ahead. We hope that, because it is an outdoor activity, we will be able to do so. If you would like to be involved, please email: hflitterpick@gmail.com. You will receive an automatic reply, and we will add you to our mailing list. If we are able to go ahead, we will contact you with full details sometime in September.

Bill Sellicks and Brian Sykes
Co-chairs

Fly Tipping

I have previously mentioned the increase in fly tipping I've seen around North Hertfordshire during lockdown, when household waste recycling sites were closed. NHDC has been proactive, and its contractor appears to be doing a standard round which has ensured that the situation has not deteriorated too much, at least in the locations they visit frequently. I have, however, been frustrated by the refusal to collect material left on private land, even when within inches of a public footpath. The picture below shows a mini trampoline, strimmer, various dishwasher racks and black plastic sacks either side of a public footpath, which I reported on 14th June. The rubbish is still there at the time of writing.



Failure to clear fly-tips often leads to a long-term build-up of rubbish. Prominent warning notices implying the use of surveillance cameras make no difference. I am sure many of you share my annoyance at the behaviour of people who show no respect for our environment in this way.

Annoyance doesn't solve the problem, unfortunately. Nationally, during the 2018/19 financial year, local authorities dealt with 1,072,000 fly tipping incidents, yet there were only 2,397 prosecutions, of which 96.2% were successful. Fines totalling £1,090,000, were issued¹. The cost of these prosecutions was £1,002,000. This, of course, does not include the incidents of fly tipping on private land, which are the responsibility of the landowner. We are all pleased when somebody does get caught and is fined.

Nationally, domestic waste is present in 62% of all incidents. Although the cost of collecting bulky waste items, such as mattresses and sofas, may be prohibitive to some, it is hard to see why individual householders would choose to drive into the countryside to dump their own black plastic bags, when taking them to a local recycling centre is free. In cases of rural fly tipping, I suspect a third party is often involved – often a builder from what I have seen in terms of the materials strewn around. Imagine a situation in which an elderly person living on a state pension has scraped together enough cash to pay for some improvements to their kitchen. A friend recommends a local tradesman who will do the work for a reasonable price. The tradesman removes an old fridge, washing machine and kitchen units, together with the packaging in which new items and the paint, grout and plaster were supplied. To dispose of this legally, the tradesman would need to have paid to register as an upper tier waste carrier with the Environment Agency. The waste (except the electrical items) will need to be taken to an appropriate centre, which for Hertfordshire is at St Albans. In North Hertfordshire, the electrical

¹ fly tipping statistics for England, 2018/19. DEFRA

<https://tinyurl.com/y3uqsr5p>

appliances should be taken to the Household Waste Recycling Centre in Letchworth. There are paperwork requirements for waste disposal at St Albans. Not surprisingly, there are tradesmen who are not prepared to either pay, or to comply with what they regard as red tape. Honest traders inevitably include the costs in any estimate they provide to the customer. It is the customer's responsibility to ask to see the builder's Waste Carrier's Licence, but many people are unaware of that requirement. The dishonest trader wins by undercutting the price charged by an honest worker. He damages the environment and contributes to the costs of either the local authority or the landowner. If he is caught, the customer is at fault and can be fined. Ignorance of the law is no defence, of course, but, particularly for the elderly without access to the internet, this hardly seems fair.

The Hertfordshire Waste Partnership (HWP) which includes HCC and NHDC, has received plaudits from organisations such as the Rural Services Network² for its innovative approach called 'Let's SCRAP fly tipping'³ which is being adopted by other local authorities. Clearly the situation is worse elsewhere. In its most recent report⁴, HWP shows that since April 2016, when Let's SCRAP fly tipping was introduced, the number of incidents of fly tipping has decreased. Unfortunately, the report does not include details of numbers of incidents or costs, so comparison with national figures is not possible. Using one of the graphics in the report, it is possible to estimate that during the year up to March 2019, there were roughly 12,000 incidents. The lack of data is, I suspect, because the costs are split between NHDC which clears up the rubbish, and HCC which is responsible for processing waste, and HCC does not distinguish between normal and fly-tipped waste for audit purposes.

The Let's SCRAP fly tipping project focuses on deterrence, yet 12,000 incidents a year seems quite a lot, suggesting that perpetrators are prepared to risk prosecution. The project has not prevented the recent increase during lockdown, which continues, despite recycling sites now being re-opened. Given the cost of cleaning-up, could the time and money taken to catch and prosecute a small fraction of the offenders be better spent? What would happen if access to recycling centres were opened up so that no paperwork was necessary (except in cases of hazardous waste such as asbestos or other toxic materials) and there were no limits on the amount of waste that could be disposed of by any one person? Could there be incentives to recycle appliances or perhaps some other category of bulky waste? How much would the government lose if the carriage of waste required no licences? There are perhaps good reasons why these suggestions would not work, but it is clear that an approach which employs a fair amount of stick and no carrots is failing to achieve what it aims to do.

Bill Sellicks
Co-Chair

Stay Positive

As we emerge from the first period of lockdown most people understandably have views on how life has changed in recent months. Indeed, there is a strong desire to hold on to some of the positive aspects, so now is a good time to present and describe some of the ways in which members of the public can influence our leaders and representatives. Below is a non-exhaustive list designed to help anyone with a desire to influence our future.

1. Contact our MP, Bim Afolami

<https://tinyurl.com/y4e8j9o2>

This is a formal, direct route to the MP. The web page gives details of several ways of making contact via social media. It defines everything you need to know about contacting him, which also means it suffers from being rather comprehensive. A simpler method is given below as item 3.

² A [not so] green and pleasant land...

<https://tinyurl.com/y2993lhj>

³ Let's SCRAP fly tipping

<https://tinyurl.com/y27d3nqr>

⁴ Hertfordshire Waste Partnership Annual Report 2018/19

<https://tinyurl.com/y48la39p>

2. Contact our local councillors <https://tinyurl.com/yxmmbdxc>

The email address of councillors can be found via this link to the NHDC main website.

3. Contact any of our representatives in government <https://www.writetothem.com/>

Enter your postcode and it will list your district councillors, your county councillor and your MP. You can write to them through this website, which is operated by the charity mySociety. This is probably the simplest route to contacting any of our representatives, including the MP.

4. Attend a council meeting <https://tinyurl.com/y6apzekj>

There are many ways through the NHDC website, but a good place to start to find out about NHDC council meetings is the calendar. From this point it is possible to click through to the plans, agendas and minutes of all committees.

5. Participate in a Town Talk <https://tinyurl.com/yyjf6wdq>

Town Talks are an open forum where the public can interact directly with our local councillors. They take place immediately before Hitchin Committee meetings. Town Talks are not listed in the calendar but can be found by searching for the Hitchin Committee. The link above gives a description of the format of Town Talks and provides links to the notes from recent meetings.

6. Attend a councillor surgery <https://tinyurl.com/y35o8jnu>

Councillor surgeries are a way to speak directly with a councillor. For Hitchin they take place on the first Saturday of every month from 10.30am until 12 noon, outdoors in Market Place, Hitchin, although at the moment they are conducted online using web-conferencing software.

7. Scrutinise the actions of the Council <https://tinyurl.com/y6moq2s4>

The council publishes minutes and reports. A good way to access these is via the calendar; see item 4 above. The link here takes you to an example of a document you can access, "THE COUNCIL'S PLAN FOR RECOVERY FOLLOWING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC".

8. Keep yourself informed about the Local Plan <https://tinyurl.com/yyrf4mxb>

The Local Plan itself and its many related documents can be found via this link. More details on the review of the Local Plan are given in the article by Andrew Wearmouth.

9. Write to the Comet <https://www.thecomet.net/contact>

This web page provides all the contact details for the Comet and a text box where a message can be sent.

10. Post views on Facebook <https://tinyurl.com/y52yeef8>

The above example is a link to a Hitchin based group that is monitored by many organisations, including NHDC. Other Facebook groups focusing on Hitchin are available.

11. View posts on Facebook <https://tinyurl.com/y54cbvxh>

This is an example of a public group, so anyone, including those without a Facebook account, can view comments.

12. Participate in national debates – Example 1: National video-based live meetings

<https://tinyurl.com/yyxhhjtt>

There are many national web-based meetings where ideas are presented and swapped. Most of these can be attended live (a free ticket needs to be acquired for attendance). The recording of the event is usually available for anyone to view as in the example below. The link above is a search for events that include the word "pedestrianisation", and results in a number of relevant meetings.

Recordings of meetings can give a good insight into a subject, but of course there is no direct way to interact. Most online meetings are recorded and published, but they are not always easy to find. Here is a recent example:

<https://tinyurl.com/y2qz5r5t>.

13. Participate in national debates – Example 2: Greener Transport Survey

This is an organisation seeking to make transport greener. It provides a link to a government survey:
<https://tinyurl.com/y2e7esgv>.

This is a government questionnaire. It is a call for ideas on the future of transport and is open for comment by anyone:
<https://tinyurl.com/ybvqthlp>.

The survey was created in response to this policy paper dealing with transport decarbonisation:
<https://tinyurl.com/y7tzhb4a>.

14. Participate in national debates – Example 3: Local Transport Suggestions

<https://tinyurl.com/y5q4ss4h>

The Widen My Path website is an easy way to see ideas that others have proposed to improve the lot of cyclists and pedestrians in the town. It is easy to add your own ideas, but there is no indication of the process by which ideas are turned into reality. We just have to hope that the relevant authorities look at the website. However, the more suggestions that are added, the greater the weight - we hope! The link here includes the coordinates for Hitchin, but the coverage is nationwide.

15. Participate in national debates – Example 4: Living Streets

<https://tinyurl.com/y5xeb279>

Living Streets is a charitable organisation whose purpose is to get the nation walking. They operate at school, local and national level, working with the public and all levels of government.

Stuart Howarth
Member of the Steering Group

Membership

Members will recall that Hitchin Forum subscriptions are due on the 1st November. The majority of you pay by standing order through your bank, although a number send cheques or cash to me for payment into our bank. In the present circumstances it would be very helpful to me to receive more (if not all) subscriptions via standing order thereby reducing the number of times I have to visit our bank in Hitchin.

I appreciate that those of you paying by cash or cheque may prefer to have the sort of control it gives you, rather than relying on your bank to get it right. Let me assure you that the Forum's bank account is regularly checked by me and any errors in the amount would be swiftly corrected. A standing order authority will be enclosed with your renewal reminder this year and it would be helpful if as many of you as possible could complete it and return it to me.

A small number of members have still not renewed their subscriptions for the current year and have been receiving newsletters etc. as if they were paid-up members. I have written to those of you who have not yet paid and would appreciate it if you could now either pay this year's subscription or let me know that you do not wish to continue to be part of Hitchin Forum.

I can be contacted by email on membership@hitchinforum.org.uk or at 5 Claymore Drive, Ickleford, Hitchin SG5 3UB.

Ken Chapman
Treasurer and Membership Secretary