



## NEWSLETTER

May - June 2022

No. 168

### Thoughts from the Co-Chair

This is an environmentally inclined newsletter – thoughts about transport issues in Hitchin, the waste generated by plastic use, the criminally careless fly tipping and the joys of our local countryside.

Our local council transport officer, as well as providing other useful information, is asking for ideas that could help resolve one of the problems around the railway station – access for bikes. The current transport layout is also a problem area for people passing by the station and a discouragement for people east of the station to cycle into town - an issue for those planning the developments at Highover and the old Weston's site on Cambridge Road. It is very good to hear of positive initiatives from the district council. We are also told that the county council will be doing a transport consultation in a few months' time.

The Weston's development is mentioned in Neil's report on planning issues. He takes great care in scanning the council's voluminous planning portal and does a great job reporting back on items of importance, and recently the erosion of the green belt has figured high in his searches.

Valerie describes local areas of green, or blue, treasure – our magnificent bluebell woods. She then comments on something that gave me enormous frustration recently. The cuckoo. I spent a morning working with the Friends of Oughtonhead on doing some necessary maintenance in the reserve, with a whole morning of hearing cuckoo calls, but with no sighting of the elusive creature. Infuriating...

The disposal of our waste is a worldwide issue – piles of plastic on distant beaches, not just our own, microfibres in the oceans, waste dumped and not recycled (ignoring whatever contracts had been agreed). It is good to see the work of Plastic Free Hitchin helping, we hope, to turn the tide on all this rubbish. Bill mentions the Hertfordshire Waste Partnership and its recent report on tackling the issues that are locally evident – and the 'Fly Tipping Group' (formed to counter the problem and not add to it...). Interesting facts emerge – such as the very low fines for desecrating the countryside with mostly domestic rubbish. Again, it is good to know that the local authorities are working on these issues, but we just need to work out why some individuals are so careless of our environment.

*Mike Clarke - Co-Chair*

### Nature on our Doorstep – Hitchin's Bluebell Woods

I have to own up to the fact that this piece was inspired by an article I recently read on bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) in the Woodland Trust's Broadleaf, Spring 2022, pages 18 to 21. The article "Feeling Blue" alerted me to just how much our mesmerising bluebell glades, found each spring in our oldest woods, feature in our history and folklore. This is not surprising given that the article tells us that more than half of the world's bluebells flower in the UK and, through the centuries, the bluebell has not only been hailed for its gluing, starching and healing properties, but also for the magic it invokes, a stark warning to those who might pick and trample them.

We are fortunate that in the surrounds of Hitchin we are so blessed with several long-established woods with their moist, rich soil that bluebells (sometimes called Cuckoos' Boots or Witches' Thimbles) abound in plenty. However, by the time you read this, I expect they may already have faded away, particularly as they are said

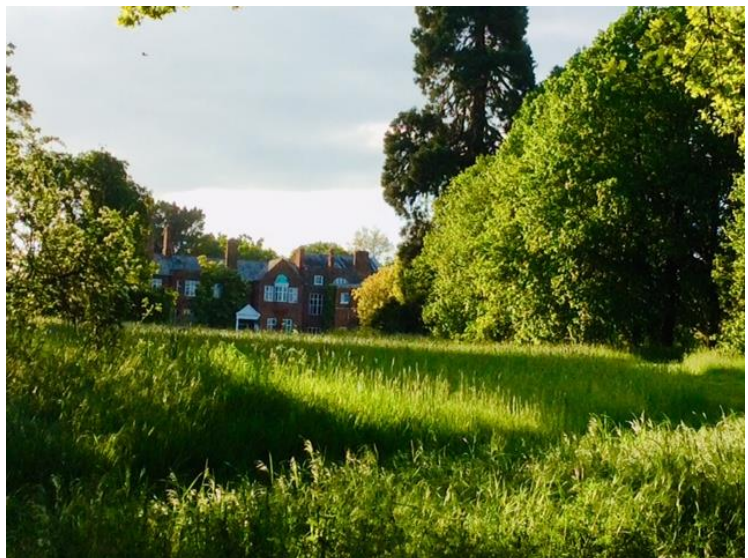
to flower roughly ten days earlier than they did in 1986. This fact is according to new research done by Cambridge University based upon the Woodland Trust's Calendar database\*. The cause, evidenced by a recent WWF (World Wildlife Fund for Nature) report, is climate change. The article goes on to tell us that, with global temperatures projected to rise by 2°C, parts of our countryside could become depleted of its *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, causing a knock-on effect for our wider biodiversity since bluebells provide an early nectar source for insects.

Moving away from the gloomy prospects of disappearing bluebells, global warming and climate change, there are thankfully several local bluebell woods we can continue to enjoy, the most notable being Hitch Wood, seen in the photo below taken by our co-chair Mike Clarke. In the 5km walk described in [Preston walk<sup>1</sup>](#) it is hailed as "one of the finest woods in the North Chilterns."



I know that many of you, like Mike, will have already visited Hitch Wood this spring not only for its bluebells but also other attractions. However, in case you didn't get your bluebell fix for whatever reason, I recommend you watch this YouTube video from eight years ago by Ray Cordell: [Bluebell Walk around the Hitchwood Trail<sup>2</sup>](#).

Because of its huge popularity, Hitch Wood and the adjacent car park can become somewhat crowded. However, thanks to a tip from Stuart Howarth, a member of our steering group, I am going to advocate a [walk from CPRE<sup>3</sup>](#) (The Campaign to Protect Rural England), which not only covers the bluebells (in season) of Walk Wood and Reynolds Wood, with the possibility of a Hitch Wood extension, but also The Bury (photo above). This was one of the childhood homes of the late Queen Mother - rather apt given this month (June) is her daughter's platinum jubilee! Incidentally, as The Bury is part of the NGS (National Garden Scheme), it is possible to visit the gardens on June 12th this year. For details, see [the NGS website<sup>4</sup>](#).





The CPRE route was last walked by one of their trustees, Liz Hamilton, in February 2017, when there were masses of snowdrops along the drive edges leading to The Bury. Acting on the tip from Stuart, I decided this was a good time to visit the less-crowded Reynolds Wood (photo below), which was reckoned to be as good for bluebells as Hitch Wood! Therefore, I set off in the afternoon of 8<sup>th</sup> May to see for myself. The CPRE walk



was as described except for one small hiccup involving an access point which was no longer apparent. However, this was easily overcome by using the map as a route guide.

There is an interesting description of a small detour to visit St Paul's Walden church with its rare early 14th century glass, and a monument to the Queen Mother in the churchyard. Those wishing to extend the walk by visiting Hitch Wood can easily do so by looking out for the sign "Hitch Wood 1 mile Footpath 9" after emerging from Walk Wood and skirting St. Paul's Walden.

On reaching Reynolds Wood a cuckoo (see photo below) was repeatedly calling.

It was the first I had heard this year. In her article in Hertfordshire Life - see [Walk around Whitwell<sup>5</sup>](#) - Liz Hamilton, in recounting her walk, also tells of the wildlife that she came across. She saw, for example, a great spotted woodpecker in Walk Wood and a male and female bullfinch in Reynolds Wood, where the centuries-old practice of coppicing is still being carried out.



*Photo credit: Michael Hooper, RSPB Hitchin and Letchworth Local Group*

One question that is often asked is how much of a danger the Spanish bluebell poses to our own. Introduced to the UK by Victorian gardeners, they have escaped into the wild to the extent that they and their hybrids can be seen nationwide on woodland edges and roadside verges. The good news is that it is very unlikely that the Spanish bluebell will overtake our native species. In the article "Feeling Blue" it is explained that a study by the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh assures us that our own strain of bluebell is much more fertile and abundant. Also, Spanish bluebells are less tolerant of shade and barely encroach on woodland. Apart from climate change it would seem that the real threats to our bluebell woods are development, such as the

construction of HS2, car fumes which feed nettles and brambles, and deer grazing. Fortunately, it has been established that once ancient habitat has been cleared of conifers, bluebells will return. Thus, if future generations are to enjoy our bluebell woods as we presently do, we need to heed the warnings and especially where climate change is concerned!

*All photographs were taken by the author unless otherwise specified.*

\*To help, log the first bluebell you see at <https://naturescalendar.woodlandtrust.org.uk/>.

1. Preston walk  
<https://www.outdooractive.com/mobile/en/route/hiking-route/united-kingdom/preston-and-hitch-wood/46983883/>
2. Bluebell Walk around the Hitchwood Trail  
<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=773-npOchYc>

3. Walk Wood and Reynolds Wood  
<https://www.cpreherts.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/30/2020/10/Whitwell-and-St-Pauls-Walden-Walk.pdf>
4. NGS website  
<https://ngs.org.uk/view-garden/1677>
5. Walk around Whitwell  
<https://www.greatbritishlife.co.uk/homes-and-gardens/places-to-live/a-walk-around-whitwell-7209108>

**Valerie Schicker - Member of Steering Group**

## **Bury Mead Springs “Tiny Forests” – Update**

Following the tremendous effort to plant 4000 trees just north of Burymead Springs early in the year in what is known as the Miyawaki method of dense planting, it is interesting to see the progress that’s in evidence already. Here’s a photo showing new growth on some of the saplings. It also puts in perspective just how incredibly dense the planting is.



*Photo courtesy of Simon Maddison. Photos of the planting event in January 2022 are available at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/simonmaddison/albums/72177720296350442>*

**Stuart Howarth - Member of Steering Group**



## Fly Tipping

The Hertfordshire Waste Partnership (HWP) coordinates waste and recycling in Hertfordshire. It consists of 10 Hertfordshire local authorities, including North Hertfordshire. Its most recent [annual report<sup>1</sup>](#) was for 2020/21. It has a Fly Tipping Group (FTG) which, in addition to local authority representatives, includes others from the County Council as well as Hertfordshire Constabulary, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, Herts Fire & Rescue, the Environment Agency and the National Farmers Union. The FTG promotes its **#Let's scrap fly tipping** initiative, which appears to be well-regarded to the extent that it is now supported by 112 local authorities nationwide. The aim is to improve how Hertfordshire responds to fly tipping by making improvements in enforcement capability and in the rollout of new technology to assist in identifying and prosecuting fly tippers. You may have seen some of its materials, which often focus on making householders aware of their duty of care in ensuring that private contractors do not fly tip any rubbish they dispose of on the householder's behalf. Householders can be issued with fixed penalty notices if they cannot demonstrate that they have checked that a contractor holds the correct Waste Carrier's License.

Just how successful is the #Let's Scrap Fly Tipping initiative? The HWP's annual reports and the [figures which it supplies to DEFRA's Wastedataflow<sup>2</sup>](#) (the web-based system for municipal waste data reporting) reveal some of the difficulties faced in combating fly tipping. With 1871 fly tipping incidents logged for North Hertfordshire in 2020/21 (the incident rate was atypically high both in North Hertfordshire and nationally during the pandemic) the chances of even a fixed penalty notice were low – just 31 (1.7% of total incidents) were issued in North Hertfordshire. In addition, there were six prosecutions costing a total of £3948, of which five resulted in conviction. The fines handed-out as a result of those convictions came to a total of £1060. In 2019/20 – a slightly more typical year - there were 1153 incidents, 12 fixed penalty notices issued and three prosecutions costing £1279 and resulting in fines totalling £788. The costs contributed to the estimated £1.57 million fly tipping bill for Hertfordshire in that year. To any potential fly-tippers out there, the message is that detection is highly unlikely, and even if caught, the penalties are minimal. It is no surprise, therefore, that the FTG has lobbied government and the Sentencing Council to take account of successful fly tipping prosecutions by updating the guidelines covering court judgements and sentencing. They are clearly too lenient to act as any sort of deterrent.

Faced with this sort of evidence, the fact that Hertfordshire's campaign is so widely praised is evidence of the intractability of the problem. The campaign may be ineffectual, but it is perceived as less ineffectual than what happens elsewhere. Perhaps, as well as trying to increase the effectiveness of the stick, we should consider a carrot. The system of charging for the removal of items of domestic waste should surely be reconsidered. Some of the most frequently dumped items I see are old mattresses and large pieces of furniture. National statistics show that domestic waste makes up about two thirds of all fly-tipped waste. That is also true for the authorities in the HWP. However, most recent figures submitted by North Hertfordshire to Wastedataflow show that in North Hertfordshire the proportion of household waste was 53.6% in 2020/21. Across the HWP in the same year, the maximum proportion of household waste was 78% and the minimum was 36%. Predominantly rural and affluent areas show lower percentages of household waste being dumped.

In North Hertfordshire the way to dispose of household items legally is to request a bulky waste collection by The council's contractor. This [costs £48.30 for up to 6 items<sup>3</sup>](#). Disposal of a fridge (which, if irresponsibly disposed of, poses a significant environmental risk due to refrigerant leaks) is £44.60. A quick trawl of a number of licensed private contractors suggests that removal by the council is probably the cheapest option. The recent and continuing cost of living rise is likely to drive some of those without the financial resources, or a vehicle to take items to the tip, to find ways to dispose of their rubbish with no questions asked. Is it not about time that councils offered free or at least heavily discounted domestic waste collection to the disabled, households on low incomes and those without a car?

1. Hertfordshire Waste Partnership Annual Report 2020-21  
<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/media-library/documents/environment-and-planning/waste-and-recycling/residual-waste-treatment-contracts/hwp-annual-report-20-21-accessible-version-2-002.pdf>

2. Waste Collection and Recycling England 2020-21 available at <https://data.gov.uk/dataset/0e0c12d8-24f6-461f-b4bc-f6d6a5bf2de5/wastedataflow-local-authority-waste-management>
3. All prices taken from North Hertfordshire's Bulky Waste Guide <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/bulky-waste-items#:~:text=Book%20a%20bulky%20waste%20collection,waste%20item%20under%20the%20service>



*Typical piles of fly-tipped rubbish in the Hitchin countryside*

## For all you need to know about fly tipping and **YOUR DUTY OF CARE**

[hertfordshire.gov.uk/flytipping](https://hertfordshire.gov.uk/flytipping)





Let's **S.C.R.A.P.** fly tipping  
[hertfordshire.gov.uk/flytipping](https://hertfordshire.gov.uk/flytipping)



David Lloyd  
**Police and Crime  
 Commissioner**  
 for Hertfordshire

*Bill Sellicks - Co-Chair*

## **Our Town, Your Say** - *a contribution from a member of NHC*

### **Introducing Edward Leigh, the New Transport Officer at North Herts Council**

I started at North Herts Council in December 2021 as the Senior Transport Policy Officer, taking over from Daniel Washington. My involvement in transport started with setting up a campaign group in 2015, Smarter Cambridge Transport, to campaign for sustainable, integrated and equitable transport in the Cambridge region. A few years working at that convinced me I wanted to make a career of transport, so I spent a year at the Institute of Transport in Leeds completing a masters in Transport Economics.

At North Herts I work in the Strategic Planning team. My main focus is on the 'strategic' (large) new sites in the emerging Local Plan.

I am involved in shaping various strategies and plans, including the North Central Hertfordshire Growth and Transport Plan (which will supersede the decade-old Urban Transport Plans); the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, which sets out what interventions are needed to create a coherent core network of cycling routes in each town; the council's parking strategy; and strategies for car parking and electric vehicle charging points. I will be involved in reviewing the Local Plan and drafting the next one, which will need to reflect more fully our growing understanding of what we need to do to reduce carbon emissions, protect the environment and improve public health.

So, what is on the radar for Hitchin?

Hertfordshire is in line to receive £29.7 million to deliver on its Bus Service Improvement Plan. In September two new buses, including one all-electric, will join the HertsLynx fleet. This flexible service, covering north-east Hertfordshire, will then offer even more availability for on-the-day bookings.

We are working towards applying for funding to install new electric vehicle charging points at some of our car parks.

I am helping the council respond to the London Luton Airport proposed expansion, which we recognise is of concern to Hitchin residents.

I am actively working with planning colleagues at North Herts and Hertfordshire to ensure that all new developments that come forward fund significant improvements to walking and cycling infrastructure, for instance along Bedford Road.

One particular challenge we face is to make access to Hitchin railway station more safely accessible by cycle. There is no easy solution for the A505 railway underpass. What do *you* think we should do? Suggestions on a postcard, please!

Two notable events to look out for:

- 16<sup>th</sup> June is Clean Air Day. The local councils will be holding 'idling action' events to explain to people why it's important to cut the engine when stationary.
- Sometime around July, Hertfordshire County Council will start a public consultation on the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) for North Hertfordshire.

If you have any questions or suggestions, feel free to get in touch with me at [edward.leigh@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:edward.leigh@north-herts.gov.uk) or on 01462 474 368.

*Any views expressed here are personal to Edward Leigh, not those of North Herts Council.*

***Edward Leigh - North Herts Council Senior Transport Policy Officer***



## Our Town, Your Say - a contribution from one of our local voluntary organisations

### Plastic Free Hitchin

Plastic Free Hitchin was formed in 2019 by a small group of volunteers, passionate about protecting our local environment for the long term and wanting to tackle the ever-increasing plastic catastrophe. Plastic Free Communities is an accredited status awarded by Surfers Against Sewage (SAS) whose framework we follow. We had made significant headway by 2020, but Covid-19 unfortunately temporarily stopped us in our tracks. We've been working hard behind the scenes, however, and we're back on the home straight to receiving this prestigious status for our beloved Hitchin town.



We already have 14 businesses signed up and we're only a few community allies short of the full house required by SAS to secure the award. Businesses, schools, social spaces, community groups and organisations can sign our pledge to:

- ♥ Aim to remove three single-use plastics in their everyday activities.
- ♥ Commit to include our stance on single use plastics in communications.
- ♥ Raise awareness and support plastic free initiatives in the community.

We have talked our way around Hitchin, hosting workshops with students, coordinating new environmental events, holding monthly groups and writing press releases. We hope to have made a positive green impact to the spaces and places in Hitchin which bring so many of you together.



Here are a few images from the recent event in Market

Place of people and companies who are passionate about reducing their and our use of plastic.

Please do follow our environmental adventure online via Instagram and Facebook where we update you on our progress, events, supporters and of course provide lots of tips and tricks to help reduce your own plastic consumption.

**Anni Sander - Plastic-Free Hitchin**



## Planning Applications

At the time of writing, we are still awaiting the Government Inspector's report without which we understood that developments in the Green Belt should not be proceeding. However, despite this, the Council is going ahead with some of the smaller sites on the basis of the National Planning Policy Framework clauses 49 and 50 – which appear to us to be far from clear!

Application 21/00434/HYA Land North of Pound Farm, London Road, St Ippolyts, SG4 7NE, proposed a residential development to provide a total of up to 84 dwellings on a greenfield site between Pound Farm to the south, the Broadmeadow housing estate to the north, the B656 to the west and a wood containing the Ippolyts brook to the east. Access to the proposed development would be via a new roundabout on the B656. We wrote opposing the application in March last year.

On 20<sup>th</sup> April we attended the North Herts Council Planning Committee decision meeting, to oppose the application. Our arguments were mostly regarding loss of green belt, traffic generation and the cumulative effects on the area of this and other proposed developments to its south, including Waterdell Lane, involving 52 dwellings and also accessed from the B656 London Road, and NHC's proposed 'safeguarded' land in the Green Belt involving up to 3100 dwellings. This would link up with Stevenage's 1,500 home western expansion currently underway. We said that - taken together with this proposal - it will involve a massive increase in development of the area, resulting in loss of green belt, loss of character, urban sprawl, traffic congestion and stresses on water supply and wastewater treatment.

St Ippolyts Parish Council spoke in favour of the application. Their only concern was primary school places. The local primary school is already oversubscribed and has limited room to expand. Also, the development is actually in Hitchin, not St Ippolyts, as far as the education authority - Hertfordshire County Council - is concerned. HCC are going to take the developer's sizeable S106 contribution and apply it to a new school at Highover, on the extreme opposite side of Hitchin. HCC talked about a 'cascade' effect, where pupils would move across Hitchin bit by bit into the new school. Apparently, there are currently vacancies in Hitchin schools, but all schools are some distance away from the Pound Farm site, and traffic will be generated and/or children will need to cross busy roads including the Three Moorhens roundabout. The Committee were not happy with this, but approved the development, which will now go ahead.

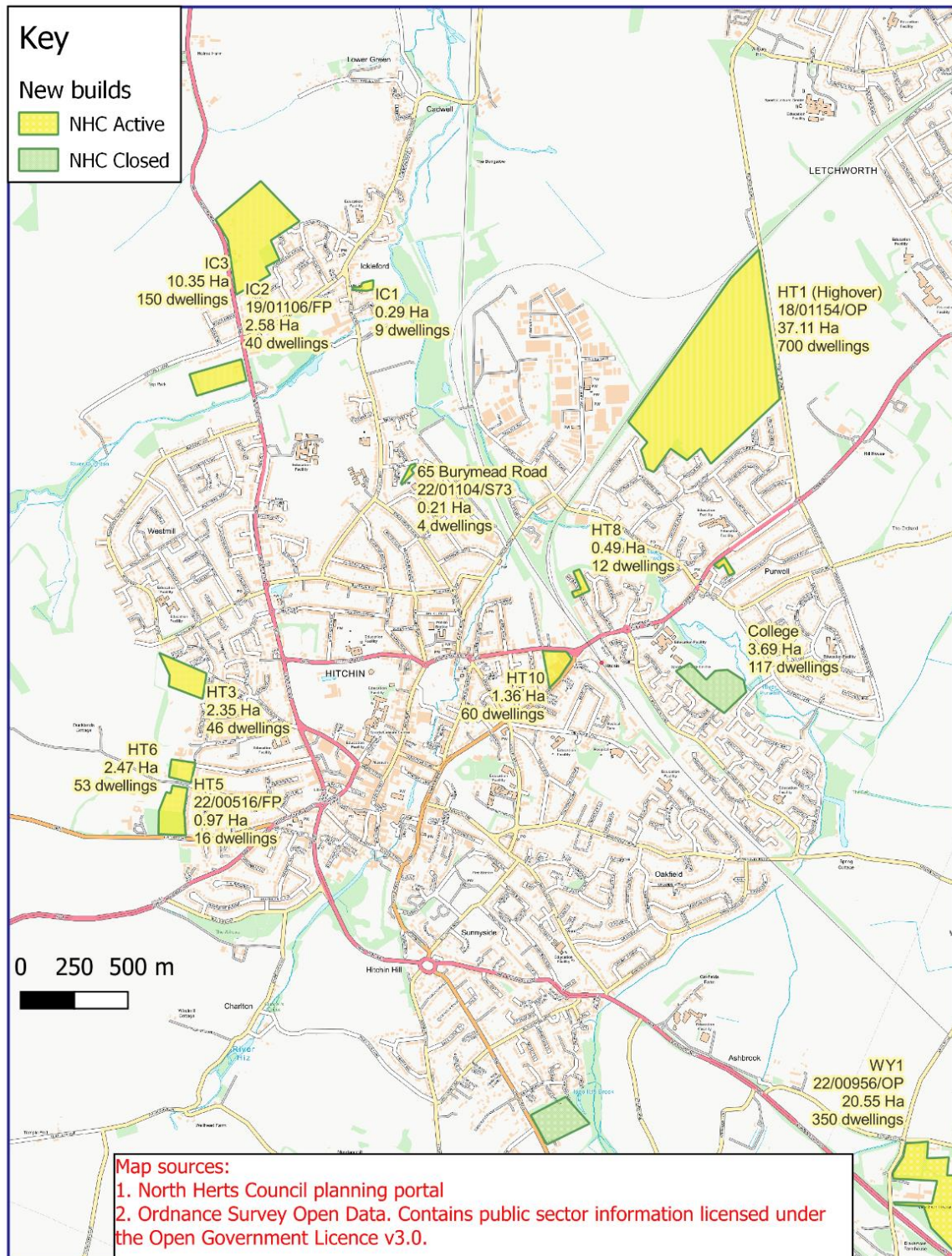
At the same meeting, councillors approved Application 21/01834/FP former Weston's Car Site and Land adjoining 114-142 Cambridge Road, Hitchin SG4 0JJ. The development involves 24 flats and 4 houses on this derelict 'brownfield' site. Hitchin Forum had made comments on, but broadly welcomed, this development at the time of application. Local councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg expressed a number of concerns in the meeting, including difficulty in engaging with the developer regarding planning requirements.

In order to keep track of developments, we have put together maps and schedules of all the current proposed development sites around Hitchin (See next pages.) These principally involve housing, but also include solar farms and show the flight path of the inbound flights to Luton Airport.

New build developments indicated as 'Closed' have either been approved, rejected or withdrawn.

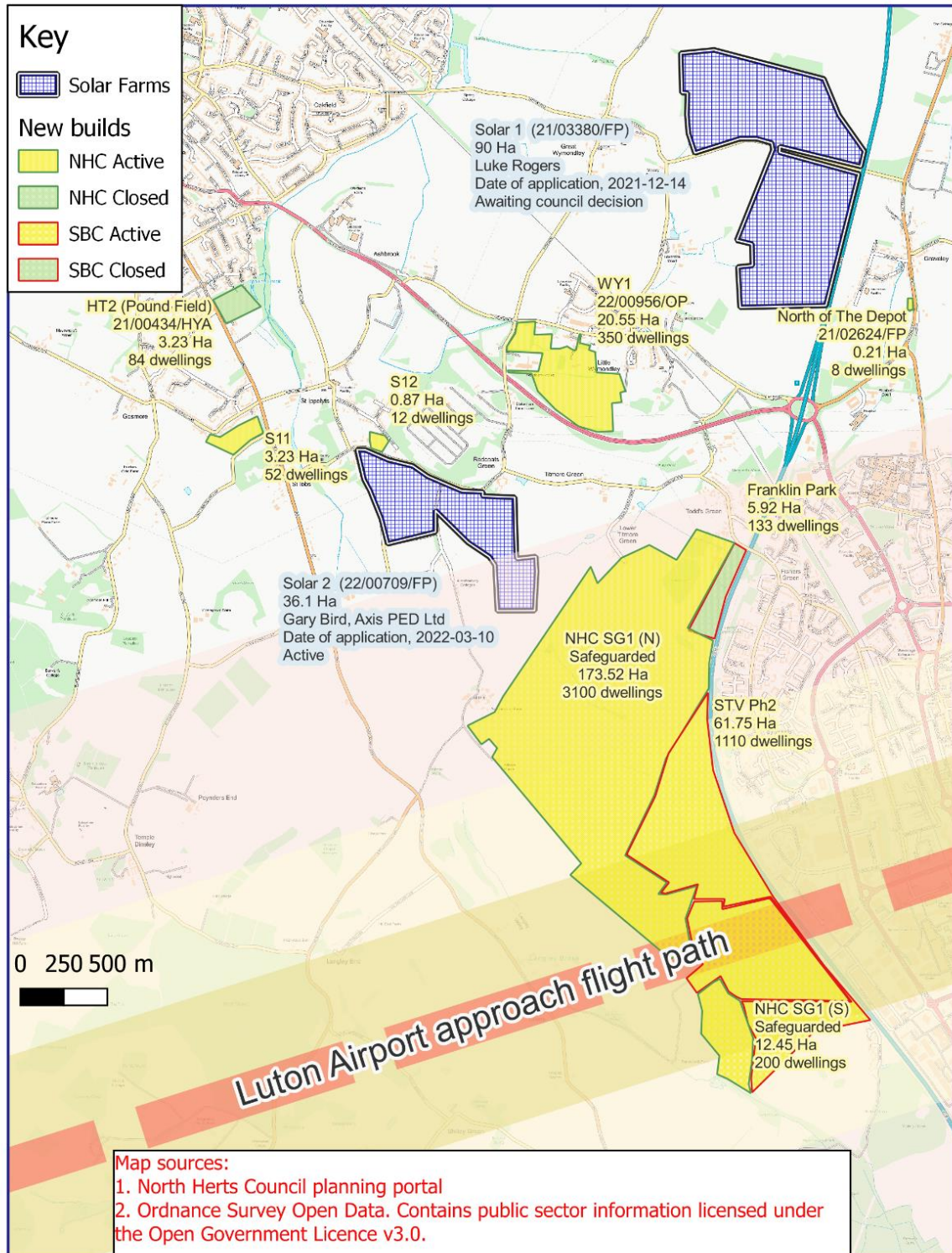
All information is taken from the NHC planning portal and overlaid onto Ordnance Survey maps.

***Neil Dodds - Member of Steering Group***

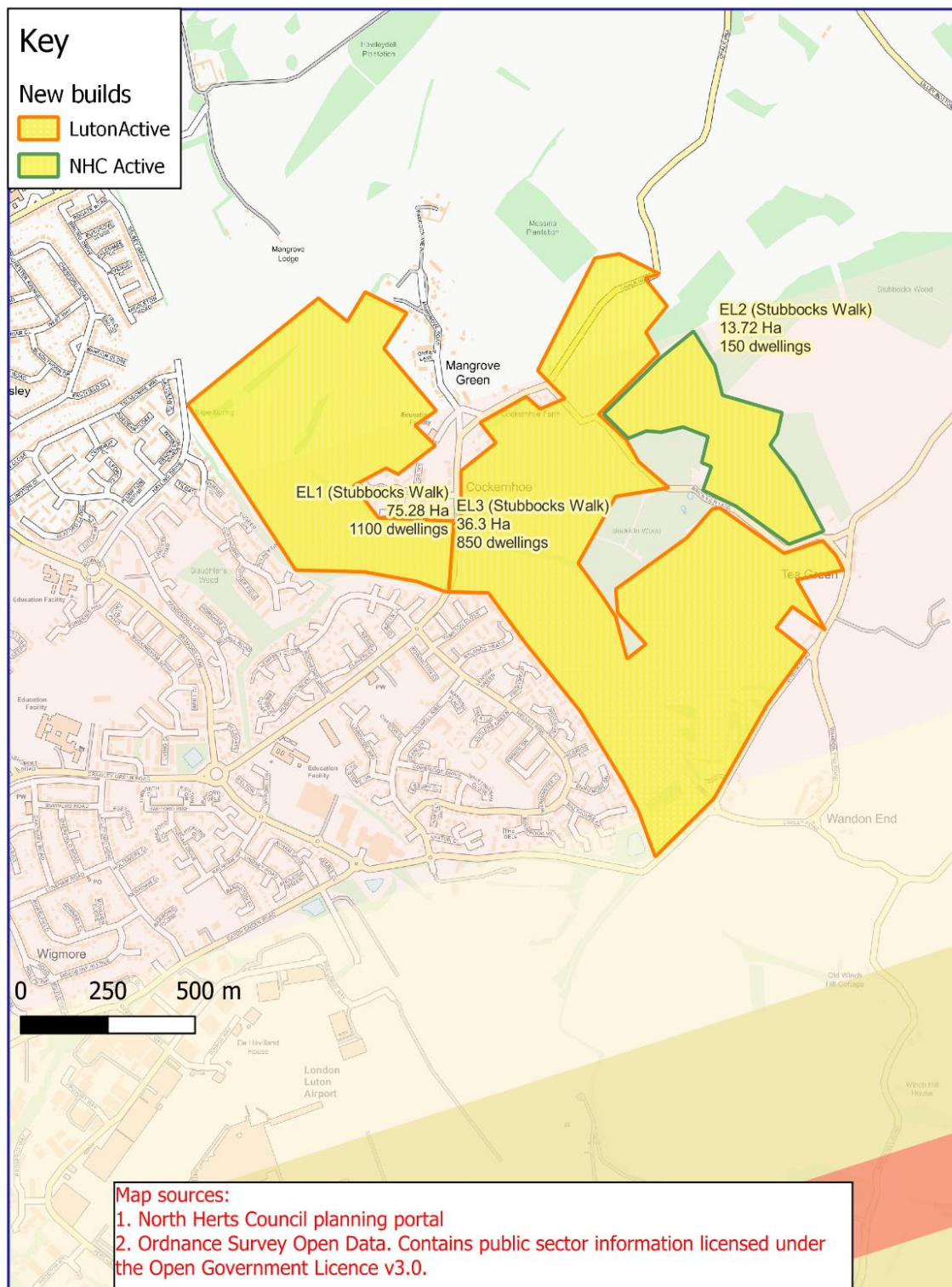


Developments around Hitchin





Developments west of Stevenage, showing Luton Airport flight path



*Developments east of Luton, showing Luton Airport flight path*



## Dates for your Diary

Clean Air Day	16 <sup>th</sup> June 2022
Public consultation on the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) for North Hertfordshire	July 2022
North Herts Council, councillors' surgery, Market Place, Hitchin	11 <sup>th</sup> June 2022, 1030 - 1200

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Please take a minute to LIKE our new Facebook page. The current page will soon be removed and, though we've done our best to save it, sadly it's time to start a new chapter. We'd really appreciate your help by liking and sharing our new page (link below) with your friends and groups to help us maintain all the followers we have at present:

<https://www.facebook.com/HitchinForum/>