

HITCHIN FORUM

Caring for our Town

NEWSLETTER

July - August 2022

No. 169

Thoughts from the Co-Chair

Another environmentally themed issue – thinking about solar panels, Luton Airport and plastic recycling. A stark reminder of the consequences of climate change is the extra hot day as I write – with new record temperatures here and 14,000 hectares of forest burning in the Gironde in south west France. And this is just for starters. Meanwhile Conservative leader candidates seem to hedge their bets about net zero by 2050 – may all depend on economic factors etc. – whilst future liveability or viability smoulders away. Solar panels, ugly or not, must be part of the response. Stuart presents some current information on where these might be installed, with comparisons between roofs and fields.

During a previous consultation on expanding Luton Airport, I asked what provisions were being made for the threatened climate change. I was told that they were ensuring the airport buildings would be fire and flood proof. They didn't mention building an ark in a spare hangar, but that would have been consistent with the mindset of the consultant. That of course was so inappropriate. Now they would add that they would make sure the runway tar would not melt. Bill writes about recent moves at our neighbouring council owned airport, with transport, air quality and economic aspects being debated. However, they say that climate issues are now labelled as a national issue and not for local planners to bother about. Think global and act local comes to mind.

When I unwrap food I wonder what to do with the containers and plastic films. Bill has unwrapped some of the mysteries of this, taking a lead from Plastic Free Hitchin with some interesting facts.

And so to relax – take a walk around the town as Valerie did from the Hitchin Information Office with the well-informed Andy Gibbs, taking in some of the blue plaques which are scattered around this historic town.

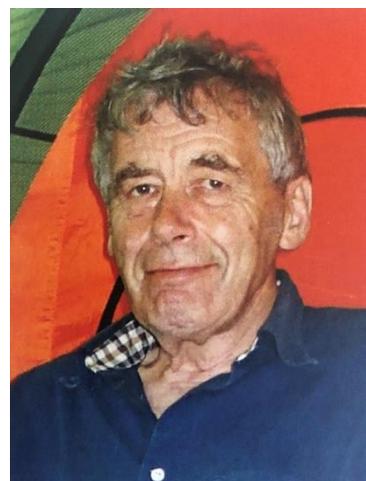
Lastly, just a few reflections on the Quaker community and the start of Hitchin Forum – just 30 short years ago. Enjoy the read.

Mike Clarke - Co-Chair

John Keene

We recently had the sad news that John Keene, until recently a long term member of the Steering Group, had passed away. He is fondly remembered as someone of great wit, quickly delivered, and with a network of useful contacts. His easy manner and charm made him a friend of many – well testified at his funeral. He disarmingly denied competence in some areas, repeatedly saying he confused his computer and toaster, but probably spent more time on his iPad than he admitted. His family talked about his technical skills - in the 1950s keeping an old Rolls Royce running (apparently a cheap buy in those days!).

He made the sometimes dull business of a meeting much more enjoyable and informative, and he will be missed.



History on our Doorstep - A stroll taking in Hitchin's blue and other commemorative wall plaques, as well as other historical features of our town

From Hitchin's bluebell woods, the topic of my last article, to another blue - the plaques in our town commemorating people and places.

Although I have lived in Hitchin since 1986, due to working in the wider Hertfordshire area I have never really got to grips, even in retirement, with all of the aspects of our historical market town. Hitchin, among other things, can boast of numerous examples of late medieval and Tudor timber-framed architecture, not to mention the later Georgian buildings. Hitchin has also been home to various talented and distinguished residents. Therefore, when I discovered that there was a walk covering historic Hitchin, I immediately signed up for it at the Hitchin Information Shop.

The walk began with our host, Andy Gibbs (well-known to many of us due to his connection with the British Schools Museum) leading us down Churchyard to view the commemorative plaque on the former [Warner's Almshouses](#)¹ at the corner of St Mary's churchyard.



After this, Andy took us to admire St. Mary's Church. The present building is said to have stood on the site of two previous churches dating from the 14th and 15th centuries, with its tower dating from around 1190. An interesting account of its heritage and artefacts can be discovered on the [Britainexpress website](#)².

We then walked to the terrace and walls fronting the Hiz, the fountain and the Church (see photo left). If you were to stand in front of the blue plaque depicted in the photo and turn around to face St. Mary's Square, you might notice that the stone steps bear the inscription, now badly in need of renovation, that commemorates the clearance of the slums in this area. A detailed history of Hitchin's slums can be found on the [Hertsmemories website](#)³.

From St. Mary's Square, turning right onto Queen Street and walking past the permanent market stall structures, The Biggin and the Seebohm garden come into view. The little garden was kept in such beautiful condition when Andy and his wife had their wedding photographs taken there, though that is sadly not the case today.

Carrying on down Queen Street, still on the right-hand side, I was amazed to learn that behind two of the red brick houses on Queen Street were sited Hitchin's Public Swimming Baths, which were filled by water from the River Hiz. The photo (right) shows what used to be the entrance and exit doorways.



Further along, on the opposite side of the road is the British Schools Museum with its large (and unique) Lancastrian Schoolroom suited to the monitorial system of teaching. It charts the history of education from 1810 to 1969. There is much to learn on the [British Schools website](#)⁴.

Still on the theme of education, a little further down the street from the British Schools Museum and also bearing a blue plaque is the Lord Lister Hotel, which is on the site of the Isaac Brown Academy – a Quaker school, which Joseph Lister (pioneer of modern antiseptic surgery) attended. Our local major hospital also bears his name.

From there to Tilehouse Street and the Priory, which started out as a Carmelite monastery in 1317 and is Grade I listed with a blue plaque to this effect. At the top of Tilehouse Street is another blue plaque on the onetime home of George Chapman (poet, playwright, translator and a contemporary of Shakespeare). The building is Grade II listed, having a concealed timber frame beneath its 18th century brick and tile façade.

On the other side of the street is what I would describe as a secret garden - tucked away almost out of sight. Here there is the memorial of Reginald Hine (see photo right), regarded as Hitchin's foremost historian. You may recall I mentioned Hine and his ghosts in a recent newsletter article on Minsden Chapel. Tilehouse Street harbours a few ghosts of its own, associated with the Cooper's Arms and the Priory as alluded to by Andy.



From Tilehouse Street to Bucklersbury - at the end of which is what must be one of the newest blue plaques, that of Hawkins of Hitchin, an institution of Hitchin life for a century and a half whose long history of trading in the town has been rightly commemorated.

In Market Place is the blue plaque on the Corn Exchange, opened for trade in 1853, three years after the railway brought new prosperity to Hitchin. There is also one on Gatwards the jewellers, which James Gatward started (in Sun Street) as a watch and clock making business in 1760. The timber-framed medieval building is Grade II listed.

Once in High Street, we stopped to look at another Grade II listed building, namely Barclays Bank, which bears a blue plaque inscribed "Sharples, Exton & Lucas Bank". These three Quakers were bankers, whose establishments merged into Barclays Bank in 1896. At the top of Brand Street a blue plaque marks the Grade II listed building of the Mechanics' Institute Library.

From the High Street we then walked along Bancroft, where there is a blue plaque paying homage to William Ransom. A keen Quaker naturalist, William founded a pharmaceutical company on the site, a Grade II listed, two-storey building of timber construction with a gatehouse.

Retracing our steps along Bancroft to the corner of Hermitage Road, the blue plaque of Frederic Seebohm can be spotted. Frederic, also a Quaker, gave some of the garden of his substantial house in Bancroft to the town, thus enabling the building of Hermitage Road.

Portmill Lane has a blue plaque on what were the offices of Hawkins Russell Jones Solicitors (the second oldest firm of solicitors in England). The building is Grade II listed and said to have the best Queen Anne façade of any building in Hitchin.

Finally, to Sun Street, where there is a blue plaque on the Sun Hotel, which dates back to circa 1575.

In case anyone is minded to take the Historic Hitchin walk, I have not replicated Andy's narrative, which brings the walk to life. All the photographs are my own.

It's possible that many of you may already have a thorough knowledge of Hitchin's past; nevertheless, I hope that I have succeeded in uncovering one or two unknown facts and/or refreshed memories of others.

A much fuller listing and description, with a map of where all the plaques are sited, can be found on the Hitchin [Historicals website](#)⁵.

1. Former Warner's almshouses:
<https://www.hertsmemories.org.uk/content/herts-history/towns-and-villages/hitchin/hitchin-church-and-warner>
2. Britainexpress – St Mary's:
<https://www.britainexpress.com/counties/herts/churches/hitchin-st-mary.htm>
3. Hertsmemories – slum housing:
<https://www.hertsmemories.org.uk/content/herts-history/towns-and-villages/hitchin/slum-housing-in-hitchin-1850s-1930s>
4. British Schools – history of education:
<https://britishschoolsmuseum.org.uk/discover/about/>
5. Hitchin Historicals:
<https://www.hitchinhistoricals.org.uk/history-of-hitchin/blue-plaques-and-other-commemorative-wall-plaques/>

Valerie Schicker - Member of Steering Group

Plastic Free Hitchin

Can we meet the challenge of the Plastic Free Pledge?

Following Anni Sander's article in our last newsletter, our steering group agreed to sign up to the Plastic Free Pledge. As a reminder, the pledge is to:

- Work to remove at least three single use plastics from our day-to-day activities
- Make a commitment to include our stance on single use plastics in communications
- Raise awareness and support plastic free initiatives in the community

Hitchin Forum's use of plastics of any kind is minimal, so in practice the pledge is about what Forum members can do individually. The Forum can, of course, support the pledge in communications, discuss the issues and thereby raise awareness. This article is the start of that process.

What is the problem with single use plastics?

The British Plastics Federation¹ (BPF) complains that while all packaging is used at least once before being either recycled or consigned to landfill, it is plastic that is unfairly identified as single use. An obvious counter-argument to the BPF's assertion is that, of the range of materials commonly used for packaging, plastics are the most damaging because they persist in the environment, eventually breaking down into microscopic fragments and fibres which can enter the food chain. They potentially act as toxins in a way which is not fully understood. This problem is compounded by littering or poor recycling practices where materials are sent

abroad, only to be dumped. Even if not correctly recycled, paper and cardboard do not break down in such a harmful way.

What do we mean by single use plastics?

Whilst there are plenty of examples, a definition is hard to find. I would suggest that a working definition would be plastic items that should be placed in the purple bin. Most obvious are the polythene bags which supermarkets routinely handed out before they were required to charge for them in 2015. Since then, smaller bags have been provided free at the checkout to give additional protection to prevent contamination from meat or fish. They were used during the pandemic for the same purpose for internet shopping, and also to keep loose items such as apples or oranges together. Other single use items include plasticised cardboard and expanded polystyrene coffee cups (and their lids, which are often black and cannot therefore be 'seen' by the detectors used in the recycling process, despite carrying a recycling symbol – see picture), drinking straws, crisp packets, sweet and chocolate plasticised film wrappers, the film lids for plastic punnets of fruit and shrink wrapping for cucumbers or broccoli. That is not to mention items such as expanded polystyrene used to package delicate items such as electricals. In terms of food packaging in particular, the list contains many items which are thin films. I will focus on food packaging in this article.



Why are thin films hard to recycle?

Most rigid plastics can be recycled, so are arguably not single use. However, problems arise when plastics of different types are combined. Take the example of the punnets of grapes available in supermarkets; the relatively rigid, transparent part of the pack is likely to be made from polyethylene terephthalate (PET) and can be recycled in our grey bins. In some cases, there is also a lid made from the same material. Very often, though, instead of a lid, there is a thin film covering the pack probably made from polythene - the same material as that used to make supermarket milk bottles, which are acceptable in our grey bins. Thin films, when mixed with more rigid plastics, are not easy to separate, and can clog, and eventually stop sorting machinery. Even if that can be avoided, they have the potential to effectively contaminate the recycle. Thin films are so damaging that recycling companies employ people to remove the problem material by hand, even though it might be less than about 2% by weight of the total material processed².

If we can't avoid them, is it possible to recycle thin films in Hitchin?

According to the BPF, all plastics can be recycled, but the technology to deal with thin films is available in relatively few places in the UK, effectively rendering them single use. A search on the Recycle Now website³, suggests that locally both Sainsbury's and Marks and Spencer provide collection points for films and plastic bags. Not only that, but the website suggests that a number of other items can also be deposited at these locations. The list includes cheese, fish and meat wrapping, crisp packets and sweet bags. I have always consigned these to our purple bin, because, in terms of overall weight, they comprise a small fraction of the total material which we do recycle, so I have always thought that, in carbon footprint terms, there is little point in the attempt to recycle them. The emphasis of the pledge, however, is more about avoiding the environmental impact of the films themselves rather than the carbon footprint inherent in their production and disposal. There certainly is a recycling bin at Sainsbury's (pictured right) but almost no information about items other than plastic bags. I checked at Marks and Spencer – both at the rear of the store and by



asking a member of staff in the store. There now seems to be no recycling provision of any sort. Waitrose is the only local store for which Recycle Now accurately describes its provision – it accepts plastic bags, and there is a recycling point inside the store, also pictured.

Can we remove three single use plastics from our day-to-day activities?

I confess that responding to the first requirement of the pledge is not going to be easy for me. I can try to avoid unnecessary packaging, although I feel that I have done that to some extent already. I always take a reusable bag to go shopping, never buy water or soft drinks in plastic bottles (these are recyclable in our grey bins) and rarely buy ready meals or packaged confectionery. I sometimes buy from outlets that will refill the customer's containers. I reuse the bags still provided by supermarkets as crude gloves for litter picking, as sandwich bags and ultimately as rubbish bags. I have assumed that if we can recycle something in our grey recycling bins, it actually is recycled. That assumption is questionable – contamination by material which should not be recycled or items which are contaminated by food may mean that what we think will be recycled actually ends up in landfill. Even if that does not happen, due to uncertainties in the ultimate destination of these items, should we effectively view them as single use? Even if material is successfully recycled, its quality and usability compared to so-called virgin material is reduced. As I described in an article in a previous newsletter, for those of us who can remember a time before plastic packaging became commonplace, contaminated food was a serious issue. Food packaging has undeniable benefits, not only to the producer and retailer, but also the consumer - reducing the risk of food poisoning and cutting down food waste. Such benefits are hard to ignore. If it is the case that such plastics should be seen as single use, I think I will struggle to eliminate them. However, a member of Steering Group has pointed out that Sainsbury's 'Smart Shop' facility allows the shopper to load their own reusable bags at the point of selection of each item, thus making it easier to avoid over-packaged items. Perhaps I need to eliminate my reliance on internet shopping!

Are there simple ways in which recycling can be improved?

In terms of thin films, organisations such as Recycle Now need to be able to keep their records up to date for recycling at, for example, supermarkets, to have any chance of success. Information about what can be recycled (and what cannot) should be displayed prominently at the recycling point. Thin film recycling needs to be part of kerbside collection. Unfortunately, that might increase the number of bins, which tends to cause confusion and may lower recycling rates.

Recycling might be much easier for the consumer if there were a national approach across the entire UK. Looking at the contents of recycling bins whenever I stay in holiday accommodation, I have to conclude that many people are either confused, don't think, or even don't care, so uniformity would be likely to improve the situation. However, councils make decisions on what and how to recycle based on local market and geographical conditions. For instance, many Scottish councils do not accept glass for kerbside recycling, presumably because it is too heavy and therefore expensive and carbon intensive to transport to a suitable processing plant. To attempt to compel all councils to adopt a uniform approach could result in resistance or non-compliance.

Would it help if the number of materials used for packaging were limited? I am not convinced. Packaging has a variety of functions depending on the contents and mode of use. Even apparently similar contents present very different challenges to the packaging designer, and plastics are so versatile that their properties can be modified at the manufacturing stage to cope with such challenges. Whilst we might say we would welcome some standardisation in this respect, packaging which is not fit for its primary purpose can be at best frustrating, and at worst, in cases of corrosive liquids, downright dangerous. I would be surprised if manufacturers or consumers would be willing to forego the advantages offered by such materials.

In conclusion

The Pledge is challenging for me, and I suspect many members. This is hardly surprising – we should be used to the complexity which has resulted from technological innovations whose immediate benefits we have enjoyed, whilst their negative consequences have only gradually become apparent. If we inform ourselves, we have a chance to make a difference, so as part of our response, we have invited Anni Sander to speak to

us after our AGM on 9th November. Full details will appear in the next newsletter, but we are hoping that we will be able to make it a face-to-face meeting, which should facilitate questions and debate.

1. Why do we need single use plastics? British Plastics Federation

<https://www.bpf.co.uk/press/why-do-we-need-single-use-plastics.aspx>

2. The Problem with Plastic Film Recycling. Lee Bradbury. Recycling and Waste World, April 2019

<https://www.recyclingwasteworld.co.uk/in-depth-article/the-problem-with-plastic-film-recycling/214210/#:~:text=When%20these%20thin%20plastic%20films,around%20moving%20or%20revolving%20machinery.>

3. Recycle Now website

<https://www.recyclenow.com/recycle-an-item/plastic-bags-and-wrapping?postcode=SG5%201UN#locator>

Bill Sellicks - Co-Chair

Solar Farms – just one aspect of a complicated discussion

Lately, we have been asked to comment on applications for solar farms in our area: there have been three farms proposed in the last few months (one near Great Wymondley, one in fields just south of Redcoats Green, and one a little further away near Bygrave). There are sure to be more, similar applications in the pipeline, such as one that seems to be emerging at Wandon End, east of Luton.

There are many aspects to consider when assessing the suitability of converting a conventional farm into one covered in solar panels, and this article positively avoids trying to cover them all. In fact, only one small, but nevertheless significant, point is considered. But first it is worth listing (but without analysis or discussion) a summary of how the creation of a solar farm might affect our neighbourhood. These effects fall into four broad categories: environmental, financial, social and aesthetic. Each can be further divided as below. The list is by no means comprehensive and seeks to avoid any judgement.

Environmental:

- Biodiversity. Balancing conventional modern farming methods against fallow land beneath solar panels
- The CO₂e balance (this is the emission, absorption or offset in terms of equivalent CO₂, which includes a measure of the impact of all other greenhouse gases)
- Chemical use (especially run-off from intensive agriculture into waterways)
- Manufacture and delivery of solar panels and batteries using exotic materials versus the use of machinery and chemicals in modern conventional farming

Financial:

- What it means for the farmer
- What it means for the electricity infrastructure provider
- What it means for the local economy (discounted energy costs, part ownership, for example)

Social:

- How it affects employment in the area
- How it restricts access to land
- How it affects how we source our food

Aesthetic:

- Shiny, eye-catching and unfamiliar sight of solar panels versus conventional arable crop colour blocks, grazing livestock or rewilded land

For a more technical discussion of the planning guidance for large-scale solar installations I recommend reading [NSC-publication-planning-guidance.pdf \(bre.co.uk\)](#)¹. Highly relevant to our local applications is that the report recommends that solar farms should not, without very good justification, be built on high quality rural land. However, this comment should come with the caveat that the report seems to have been published in 2013, so the recommendations (and attitudes) may have changed since then.

Just one aspect: Field-based or roof-mounted solar energy collectors?

One of the objections to the use of farmland for solar farms is that industrial buildings – especially the big warehouses – should be fitted with roof-mounted panels in preference to farms. This objection seems to go unchallenged, possibly because it seems to make sense but also maybe because it would involve significant effort to check or challenge it. Indeed, the use of this objection is actively promoted by [The Countryside Charity \(CPRE\)](#)², who are cited in public comments.

Whilst on the face of it using spare roof space seems like a good idea, it is worth putting a few key aspects of it in perspective. A modern solar generation facility – whether roof-mounted or sited in a field - uses two electrical elements: solar panels and batteries. These are combined into a system that optimises the timing of when electrical energy is fed into the national grid. Without the storage function of the battery there would be no choice but to feed any energy generated straight into the grid, even when there is low national demand. The battery helps out by temporarily storing the excess energy so that it can be fed in later, or even by taking energy from the grid, for example, overnight, and storing it for use when demand is higher.

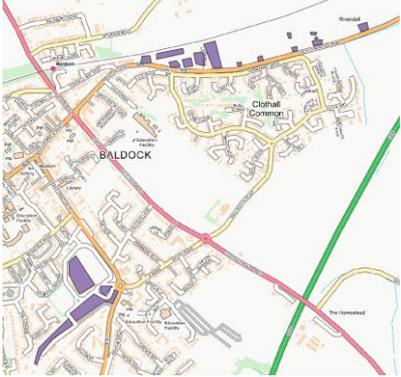
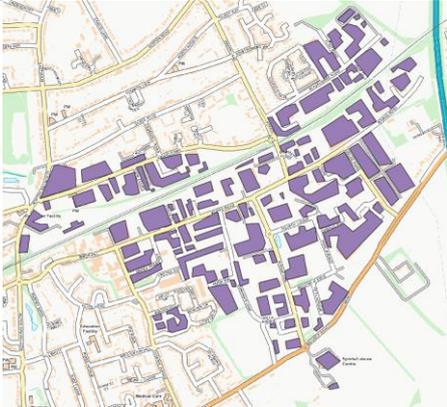
By studying the local Ordnance Survey map it can be seen that Hitchin, Letchworth and Baldock combined have a total of approximately 170 buildings in their industrial areas. Further analysis reveals that the total ground area occupied by those buildings is about 61 Hectares (Ha), or about 150 acres in old money. A review using Google Earth satellite imagery of typical buildings with solar panels mounted on them indicates that, when taking into account roof borders, north-facing pitched roofs, shadows and other superstructure on the buildings, the total area available for solar panels is about a third of the total plan view area. So, assuming every one of our local industrial buildings were fitted with solar panels, the area of solar panel would be about 20 Ha (50 acres). By comparison, the combined areas of the three major solar farms currently proposed for the district total approximately 181 Ha, or about nine times as much. They would be served by three large battery systems as opposed to the 170 individually-owned smaller battery systems required on buildings.

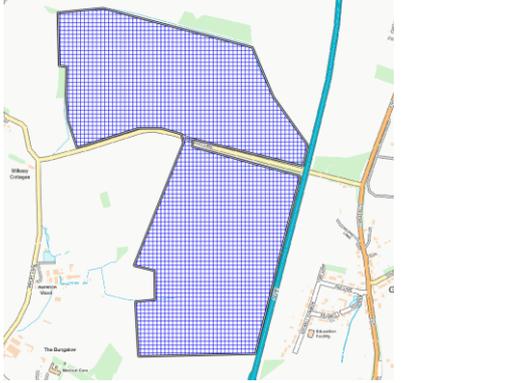
It is also worth noting that, unlike domestic buildings, industrial buildings are typically designed and constructed taking into account only the roof loads anticipated at the time. Hence, unlike most domestic buildings, the addition of solar panels might either not be acceptable or might require some additional roof support or other strengthening.

On the following pages is a visual summary of the relative areas of the proposed solar farms and local industrial buildings – all at the same scale. For further perspective and comparison there is a map of 12 of the large warehouses visible from the M1 motorway near Milton Keynes.

Table of the Outlines of Potential Solar Collector Installations

All maps are to the same scale so that simple area comparisons can be made

<p>Map sources:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. North Herts Council planning portal 2. Ordnance Survey Open Data. Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0. 	
	<p>Baldock industrial area: 17 buildings covering 3.9 Ha</p> <p>Estimated useful roof space: 1.3 Ha</p>
	<p>Letchworth industrial area: 112 buildings covering 39.5 Ha</p> <p>Estimated useful roof space: 13.2 Ha</p>
	<p>Hitchin industrial area: 44 buildings covering 17.5 Ha</p> <p>Estimated useful roof space: 5.8 Ha</p>

	<p>Milton Keynes large warehouse group near the M1 motorway: 12 buildings covering 51.0 Ha</p> <p>Estimated useful roof space: 17 Ha, although it is highly unlikely that the roofs would have been over-designed sufficiently to accommodate solar panels</p>
	<p>Proposed solar farm near Great Wymondley: Planning application no. 21/03380/FP, area 90 Ha</p> <p>https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/view-or-comment-planning-application</p>
	<p>Proposed solar farm on land south of Redcoats Green: Planning application no. 22/00709/FP, area 36.1 Ha</p> <p>https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/view-or-comment-planning-application</p>
	<p>Proposed solar farm land north of Bygrave: Planning application no. 22/00741/FP, area 55 Ha</p> <p>https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/view-or-comment-planning-application</p>

In Conclusion

By comparing the areas and number of solar energy capturing installations covered by each of the above maps it is clear that it is far more efficient – both in cost and in sheer quantity of sets of electrical equipment needed - to install field-sized systems rather than roof-mounted systems.

This is by no means such a straightforward issue as campaigners such as CPRE would have us believe. The last year has demonstrated the importance of both food and energy security. The recent weather should remind us that climate change is a reality which needs to be tackled urgently. The current fuel and cost of living crises are generating a clamour to cut green taxes and permit more fossil-fuels to be burnt, putting pressure on the commitment to the UK's net zero target. Solar photovoltaics offer a relatively sustainable contribution to meeting that target – sustainable because, if new technologies emerge, it will be comparatively easy to remove the panels and use the relatively undamaged area for other purposes. On the other hand, the proposed areas may have been productive farmland which we can ill-afford to lose. We must recognise that whatever is done, there will be an impact which somebody will not like. To what extent should the aesthetic objections of campaigners be taken into account? Members are invited to engage in the debate, maybe even to write or help write an article that helps us form our own balanced opinion of what will surely be an increasingly frequent challenge to the planning system over the coming years.

1. Building Research Establishment (HQ in Garston, Herts): Solar PV planning guidance
[https://www.bre.co.uk/filelibrary/nsc/Documents Library/NSC Publications/NSC-publication-planning-guidance.pdf](https://www.bre.co.uk/filelibrary/nsc/Documents%20Library/NSC%20Publications/NSC-publication-planning-guidance.pdf)
2. The Countryside Charity (CPRE) statement on solar farms
https://www.cpre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Feb-22_CPRE_Policy-statement-on-solar-energy.pdf

Stuart Howarth - Member of Steering Group

Luton Airport Update

As members will remember, the decision which Luton Borough Council made at the end of last year to permit Luton airport to increase its passenger number cap to 19 million per year and relax some noise controls previously agreed was called-in by the Department for Levelling-Up, Communities and Local Government. The inquiry, which will be heard by three planning inspectors, will start on 27th September and is likely to last six weeks (although this is unlikely to be continuous). The interests of local community groups, including Hitchin Forum, will be represented by Andrew Lambourne, Chair of LADACAN (Luton and District Association for the Control of Aircraft Noise). The Forum has contributed £250 to a fund to allow LADACAN to pay for advice and research, and a number of members have also donated to support this effort. On 6th July, a Pre-Inquiry Meeting (PIM) was held in order to decide on a number of matters of procedure. In the documents released in advance of that meeting, the planning inspectors due to hear the case issued a list of what they called 'Main considerations and other matters'. The list was interesting in that the first item was the implications of the proposal for meeting the challenge of climate change. In a note following that meeting, issued on 15th July, both Luton Borough Council and the airport named experts on climate change to support their case. In a reflection of concerns most frequently mentioned by objectors, the original Report by Luton Borough Council's Head of Planning (which recommended that the proposals be permitted) made multiple repetitions of the assertion that climate change should not be a consideration to be taken into account by Luton's Development Control Committee. It was claimed that this was because overall climate change policy was a matter for national, not local government. Perhaps that assertion is more open to challenge than the officer would like us to believe. Other considerations which will be examined are:

- The effect of noise associated with the proposal on health, quality of life, and the character of the area
- The effect of the proposal on air quality
- The effect of the proposal on sustainable transport objectives and transport infrastructure
- The socio-economic implications of the proposed development
- Whether the proposed development would be consistent with the Development Plan and other relevant policies
- The effect of other considerations on the overall planning balance

An inquiry website has been set up by the Programme Officer, and can be accessed by the link below.

<https://gateleyhamer-pi.com/en-gb/luton-airport/library-documents/core-documents/>

Bill Sellicks – Co-Chair

Co-chair's Tailpiece - The Friends and the birth of Hitchin Forum

On a Saturday in July I sat with others in the Friends Meeting House garden, aka the Quakers' burial ground and site of their Meeting House, as the Peace Garden sculpture was unveiled, pictured here (do go and have a look). Two things were passing through my mind. One was that Hitchin Forum was started over 30 years ago, by the Quakers. The person who was the main organiser of the sculpture, Chris Kell, was also on the first steering group. The spark which set off the idea of the Forum was however the then Rector of St Mary's – Clifford Offer. There had been a proposal to develop land at the rear of the Brookers site (then housing the builders' merchant part of the company which later moved to Bilton Road) and to expand northwards across West Alley. Clifford pointed out this would obliterate the 1,000 year old West Alley. As an historian he thought this dreadful and asked "who speaks for Hitchin?". That is a contentious question, but the Quakers thought that there should be a new group formed - hence the foundation of the Forum. Another Quaker knew that Ellie Clarke had fought and won a brief battle to save the Ransoms Rec allotments and she was soon recruited as the general secretary. It has long since not been a Quaker group, but their vision and energy got it going.



The other thing on my mind has been how education evolved in Hitchin. This started with thoughts about a walk around Hitchin looking for connections with the British Schools Museum. Quakers had set up some independent schools in Hitchin over the centuries – including Isaac Brown's Academy where Joseph Lister (later Lord Lister), who introduced antiseptic procedures in surgery, was a pupil, and Blaxland's School, where Samuel Tuke, a great reformer in mental health therapy in the 19th century, attended. The British School in Queen Street was founded following the inspiration of a Quaker – Joseph Lancaster. His visit to Hitchin in 1808 led to William Wilshere (strangely not a Quaker...) donating buildings where the school started. Quakers were then very involved in supporting the British School. A Quaker family, the Seebohms, donated various assets to the town, including Windmill Hill and the ground for the Girls' School.

This is not a Quaker promotional piece, but a note of gratitude for what they have done for the town, including getting Hitchin Forum going 30 years ago!

Mike Clarke - Co-Chair

Dates for your Diary

Annual General Meeting – Venue to be advised

9th November 2022

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