

HITCHIN FORUM

Caring for our Town

NEWSLETTER

September – October 2024

No. 182

Thoughts from the Co-Chair

It is a busy, and wet, season. The Churchgate Regeneration show was on the road at the beginning of September, with presentations, displays, and group discussions at the Council's Community Forum. The 'Hub', with opportunities to see those same displays and discuss with officers and consultants, followed in Market Place, next to Etcetera. The consultation with an online survey continues until Sunday 20th October – <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/churchgate-shopping-centre-regeneration>, so do let them know what you think!

We have also been focusing on the dreadful trail of metal recycling trucks through the town, partly marked by the metal bits and pieces they manage to drop. Fires in the industrial area, apparently from stored batteries, have added to the concerns.

The 2016 HCC study as to the feasibility of a road into the industrial area from Stotfold Road, which was made possible by then county councillors Judi Billing and Derrick Ashley, produced an array of statistics but was only based on two four-hour traffic observations on one day. The focus was on Grove Road, but the impact is also felt in other residential streets en route to and from the scrap yards. The trucks have kept coming, but how many now? – there seem to be ever more! The 2020 petition organised by Grove Road residents drew no support from the Executive Member for Transport at the County Council, but the issue needs to be revisited. We are pleased to see our new MP and our district councillors working on this.

Can there be a solution – as suggested in 2016 - resulting in a new road from the industrial area to Stotfold Road? Or a review of how the licensing of such sites with access through residential areas can be allowed? We live in hope...

What follows is a part of our usual diet – Neil's excellent beady eye on the local planning lists and Bill's detailed view on the Luton Airport plans. Valerie takes a wander through Ickleford, which is also home to the River Hiz Conservation Group - <https://x.com/riverhiz>.

I encountered the latter at the excellent Triangle Community Garden Summer Fete. If you don't know – "it is a charity helping people of all ages and abilities to 'Connect, Grow, Enjoy' through gardening and contact with the natural world". Find them at <https://trianglegarden.org/> and in Ransoms Recreation Ground.



The Triangle Community Garden Summer Fete

Mike Clarke - Co-Chair

Planning

In the previous newsletter I explained how HT3, the last of the former Green Belt sites around Hitchin, had gained approval under the threat of legal action. It does seem that after all the urgent rush to get these sites approved nothing much is happening on the ground - so much for the urgent need for homes! Note that the Burford Grange site up the Bedford Road, which is nearing completion, is technically in Ickleford, and not within Hitchin itself.

These last two months have seen applications for a different type of development, involving a change of use of three existing buildings in the centre of town, as follows:-

Redevelopment of 9-10 High Street - formerly Woolworths and more recently Poundland and M&Co - to two smaller shop units on the High Street and 44 apartments, extending back to Paynes Park. We wrote about this in Newsletter 180 and were initially generally in favour, with some reservations, but widened our comments in August to object to the almost entirely residential nature of this development in the centre of Hitchin. We said that alternative uses for the site, such as more retail and a flexi-space boutique cinema, could better reflect the needs of the town and should be investigated before adopting the developer's proposals.

Conversion of offices at Radcliffe House, Old Charlton Road, to 49 apartments. We had no objection in principle to the proposal to convert the whole of this large and stylish office building to residential use, with existing on-site parking. Our comments on the detailed proposals were regarding fairly minor aspects of the new development.

Change of use of existing piano showroom/workshop at 94A Tilehouse Street to form one 3-bed dwelling. We wrote stating that we had no objection in principle to the proposal to convert this piano workshop and showroom to residential use. We wrote that 'mirror foil' which was proposed to be affixed to the inside of the showroom windows would be an alien addition to the streetscape in the Conservation Area, and should be avoided. Alternatives could be to install adjustable internal louvres, which would prevent easy vision from outside and which could be supplemented with internal curtains for night-time use. We were pleased that the existing wall crane, existing street-facing façade and leaded fenestration are being retained.

Changes of use that have recently been granted planning permission are:-

Change of use of Westbourne Residential Care Home on the corner of Bedford Road and Oughtonhead Way to become 16 flats. We wrote commenting on this last July, including objecting to the removal of the fine specimen fir tree in the front garden to create a parking space.

Change of use of former Bull at Gosmore from pub to house. Since the Bull is technically in St Ippolyts rather than Hitchin we have no comments to make on this application, but include it to draw attention to it.

On a completely different aspect of planning, Bearton Road has recently been reconfigured to help drivers stick to the 20 mph speed limit that was introduced through the good offices of the late Councillor Judi Billing MBE. The changes include the addition of speed humps and a zebra crossing, and the demarcation of parking bays. The latter has resulted in a single lane only four metres in width. This is barely sufficient for vehicles travelling in opposite directions to pass and has resulted in difficult driving conditions. An overall reduction in speed has been achieved, but at the cost of risking driver confrontations and damage to vehicles. To avoid this, many drivers are already parking over the kerb.

Neil Dodds – member of Hitchin Forum Steering Group

Airport update Sept-October 2024

The decision on whether to allow Luton Rising's Development Consent Order to increase its passenger numbers to 32 million per annum by 2038 has been delayed due to the general election. The decision will be taken by both the Secretary of State for Transport, Louise Haigh, and the Secretary of State for Housing,

Levelling-up and Communities, Angela Rayner. At the time of writing, it is due on 4th October. After the decision has been made, individuals and organisations may challenge the decision in the High Court for a period of six weeks in a judicial review.

There have been a number of developments recently. In the period since the Planning Inspectors submitted their report and recommendation to ministers on 10th May there have been two further consultations. The first, finishing on 19th August, drew responses from the applicant (i.e. Luton Rising), several local councils and organisations such as Natural England. Luton Rising's responses were often explanatory documents, among other things, to do with its Green Controlled Strategy. In a [joint response¹](#), North Hertfordshire and Hertfordshire County Councils made clear that there were significant disagreements between the councils and Luton Rising about traffic monitoring and the design of Hitchin junctions in particular. The second consultation, which closed on 6th September, is a request for further comment on the documents submitted to the first consultation.

On 23rd August, Luton Rising wrote to the Planning Inspectorate to ask if it needed to provide more information on greenhouse gas emissions. What prompted the letter was the Supreme Court ruling of 20th June this year in the so-called '[Finch Case²](#)' against Surrey County Council. In 2019, the Council had given permission for oil wells to be developed without a requirement to assess the emissions arising from the combustion of the oil extracted. That decision was unsuccessfully challenged in the High Court by campaigner Sarah Finch on behalf of the Weald Action Group, after which she took the case to the Supreme Court and was successful. Following that judgment, Gatwick airport, as part of its Development Consent Order proposal to allow further expansion, provided assessment of greenhouse gas emissions associated with inbound flights and 'well-to-tank' emissions. [Well-to-tank emissions³](#) are defined as 'all greenhouse gas emissions from the production, transportation, transformation and distribution of the fuel used to power the vehicle'. I take that to mean that it is a measure of the emissions resulting from the production and supply of fuel to the airport. This does not include in-flight emissions from departing aircraft – the rationale being that for carbon footprint accounting purposes, in-flight emissions are shared between the departure and arrival terminals (for domestic flights) or between countries. The upshot is that Luton Rising was requested to provide similar information by 6th September.

Whether any of this makes any difference to the decision to be revealed on 4th October is unclear (and may even be delayed further). If a decision to grant permission is made (which I think is likely) then there may be caveats that take a range of factors into account, and which require expensive mitigation. If that is the case, expect protracted wrangling as Luton Rising fights to maximise its profits.

1. Response letter from Hertfordshire / North Hertfordshire Councils dated 19th August:
<https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/wp-content/ipc/uploads/projects/TRO20001/TRO20001-003465-Hertfordshire%20County%20Council%20and%20North%20Hertfordshire%20District%20Council.pdf>
2. R (on the application of Finch on behalf of the Weald Action Group) (Appellant) v Surrey County Council and others (Respondents):
<https://www.supremecourt.uk/cases/docs/uksc-2022-0064-press-summary.pdf>
3. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Central Asia:
<https://www.unescwa.org/sd-glossary/well-tank-wtt-emissions#:~:text=Term%3A,the%20manufacture%20of%20the%20vehicle>

Bill Sellicks – Co-Chair

The Villages on our Doorstep - Ickleford, St Ippolyts, Gosmore and Charlton

For those of us living in Hitchin it is easy to extol the attributes of our town, described by Visit Hitchin on its website <https://visithitchin.com> as 'a beautiful market town with so much to offer. Incredible history, an amazing shopping experience with an abundance of independent stores, a fantastic food and drink scene and entertainment, art and culture for all.'

But what about our closest villages: Ickleford - situated on the northern outskirts of our town on the west bank of the River Hiz and east of the main A600 road; St Ippolyts - located in between the A602 and the B656 roads to our south-east; Gosmore - a hamlet in the Parish of St Ippolyts; and Charlton - a component hamlet of our town also to the south?

Taking each in turn over the next one or two newsletters, starting with Ickleford, it is intended to uncover their origins, highlight their individual charm and reveal some of the secrets they hold.

Part 1 - Ickleford

To delve into the origins of Ickleford one could do no better than read the extensive 27-page document produced by [Keith J. Fitzpatrick-Matthews¹](#) of North Herts Museum, dated July 2020, or browse the web pages on [Hertfordshire in British History²](#). However, facts about Ickleford are more simply described by its Parish Council on [its website's history page³](#), the source for much of the following paragraphs.

Importantly, to begin with, the name 'Ickleford' is derived from it being a ford, that is a way to cross a river, along the Icknield Way. Thus, Ick plus Ford. Detailed information on both the village's sign and name is to be found on [waymarking.com](#), which states:

"The upper half of the sign depicts the origin of Ickleford's name. The two travellers fording the river allude to the ford part of the name. Unlike many towns and villages with ford in their name, Ickleford does not get its name from the river being forded, but instead from the way that fords the river, namely the Icknield Way.

The lower half of the sign, separated from the upper half by the Ickleford name on a scroll, shows one of Ickleford's major activities, milling. The mill wheel, wheat stoop and milling stone all refer to Ickleford Mill."

It should be noted that waymarking.com, apart from the information on the village sign, leads us to other interesting signs and photographs associated with Ickleford, such as St Katharine's Church mentioned below. Just search on 'Ickleford'.

Naturally, a mention must be given to Ickleford's St Katharine's Church that has a 12th Century Norman nave and blocked north doorway with beautifully carved zigzag arches and a south aisle and chapel added by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott in 1859. The east window has some fine stained glass of 1860. Furthermore, it is the burial-place of Henry Boswell, known as the 'King of the Gypsies', who died in 1760 at the grand old age of 90; the remains of his wife and granddaughter are similarly buried here.



The Ickleford village sign

Important routes that cross the village are: The Icknield Way Path ([icknieldwaypath.co.uk](#)), which passes through on its 110-mile journey from Ivinghoe Beacon in Buckinghamshire to Knettishall Heath in Suffolk; and The Icknield Way Trail ([icknieldwaytrail.org.uk](#)), a 170-mile equestrian and mountain biking route that also passes through the village. The Bedford to Hitchin railway line used to pass through the village; remnants can still be seen in places such as Gerry's Hole (now an

important toad, frog and newt spawning area, but technically in Hitchin) where parts of the old bridge and embankment are still present.

We also learn from the parish council's history page that Ickleford was partly in Bedfordshire until the Bedfordshire portion of the civil parish (detached parts of Shillington and Holwell) was transferred to Hertfordshire during the 1800s.

If you were to walk the [HOOP⁴](#) you would not only encounter Ickleford on the Old Westmill - Ickleford - Wilbury Hills sections but you would also be able to see, from the HOOP section to the east of the bridge over the railway line, lavender fields at Cadwell Farm (see adjacent photo), one of Ickleford's main attractions that you may well have already visited. For those interested in the history of lavender in our area and its revival see the [Hitchin Lavender⁵](#) website. In this we learn that lavender started being grown commercially in and around Hitchin as early as the 1500s. In the 1760s, the Perks family started to grow lavender on a large scale. Later on, in the 19th Century, Perks entered into a partnership with the Llewellyn family and became commercially very successful, establishing a nationwide reputation for the high quality of their products.



Lavender fields at Cadwell Farm

Ickleford further features in the [Hicca Way leaflet⁶](#). This signposted walk follows the River Hiz valley through both Ickleford and Charlton, which will be covered in a future newsletter.

Possibly an even better way to discover the village in greater depth is by walking the parish using this [Discover Ickleford map⁷](#) containing several points of interest.

Photographs credit of the author

Valerie Schicker - member of Hitchin Forum Steering Group

1. The Origins of Ickleford:
<https://northhertsmuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-origins-of-Ickleford.pdf>
2. Hertfordshire in British history:
<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/herts/vol3/pp21-25>
3. Ickleford Parish Council website history page:
<https://ickleford-pc.gov.uk/the-parish/parish-history>
4. Hitchin Outer Orbital Path:
<https://www.walkwalkwalk.co.uk/shorter-walks/hitchin-outer-orbital-path-hoop>
5. Hitchin Lavender:
<https://hitchinlavender.com/lavender-history/>
6. Hicca Way leaflet:
https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/hicaway-electronic-leaflet_0.pdf
7. Ickleford Parish - a discovery walk:
<https://ickleford-pc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Footpath-Map.jpg>

Hitchin Forum Public Meeting - Transport

On 10th September, Hitchin Forum hosted a public meeting. The subject was wide, addressing transport issues in Hitchin, and despite an England International football match and heavy rain, the meeting was well attended. The guest speaker was Jeff Clayton, who is the Hertfordshire Highways Implementation Manager at County Hall, and who was responsible for the recent execution of the Bearton Road and Hermitage Road improvements.

Prior to the meeting, the co-chair of Hitchin Forum, Bill Sellicks, had asked for questions to be sent to him, and the list was divided into four basic subjects: Traffic Congestion, On-Street Parking, Heavy Lorry Traffic and recycling depot issues, and the A602/ Willow Lane Road junction. Discussion was lively, prompting further questions from the floor, and Jeff was very helpful in the information and answers he gave.

Space here precludes a more detailed report, but I am in no doubt that those present obtained a clear picture of the methodology behind the County Council modelling research which leads to improvements throughout the town.

Bill Sellicks has written a full report on the meeting, available on the Hitchin Forum website.

Andrew Wearmouth - Member of Hitchin Forum Steering Group

Membership Subscriptions

Members are reminded that subscriptions for the coming year are due on 1st November 2024. These are payable at a rate of £10 per individual, £15 per organisation and £20 per business. Many of you pay by standing order and that is welcomed as it makes it easier for me to manage.

If you don't pay by standing order and would like to do so, please contact me at kenchapman48@googlemail.com and I will let you have a form for submission to your bank. Alternatively, if you would like to pay via internet banking our account is with Lloyds Hitchin, sorting code number 30-94-30, account number 02256820 in the name of Hitchin Forum.

If you wish to pay by cheque, it can be sent to me at 5, Claymore Drive, Ickleford, Hitchin, Herts SG5 3UB, again payable to Hitchin Forum.

I look forward to receiving your annual subscription.

Ken Chapman – honorary treasurer

Dates for your Diary

Hitchin Councillor Surgeries. Hitchin Market Place.	10.30 am to 12.00 noon	First Saturday of every month
Hitchin Forum Autumn Litter Pick Please email hflitterpick@gmail.com if you would like to take part and have not already received communications from us.	10.00 am to 12 noon	Sunday 20 th October
Annual General Meeting to be followed by the postponed talk from Elizabeth Hamilton of CPRE: 'A Recent History of Hertfordshire – and how CPRE continues to campaign to protect the countryside'. Venue: Walsworth Community Centre	7.30 pm for a 7.45 pm start	Wednesday 6 th November