

NEWSLETTER

January - February 2026

No. 189

Thoughts from the Co-Chair

We ended the last year with our AGM – not a crowded event, but it was very good! A summary of Keith Hoskins' 'chat' and the discussion is here. He made reference to the 2004 Town Centre Strategy (and when will there be a riverside walkway??).

Following on from that, the current North Herts Town Centre Strategy Consultation (which ended on 30th January) has received our attention, and a response has been sent to the council. That is included here.

A new year, but some of the old problems continue! The appeal against the expansion of Luton Airport failed, but the fight continues. LADACAN are contemplating a further appeal which we support – Bill gives the details.

Preparation for the Highover development continues, with some of the clear problems of lack of infrastructure not having been addressed. We have written to North Herts Council about this, and Neil also mentions a few other planning issues.

But turning away from those blights there is a little light – Valerie highlights Hitchin Nature Network and its inspiring 12 days of Christmas. And then – a forest in Hitchin!! Who would guess??

We hope for a happy and healthy new year for all.

Read on and let us know your thoughts.

Mike Clarke – Co-Chair

Hitchin Forum AGM

The Forum's AGM was held on 3rd December 2025. Again, we had a small turn out – maybe it was too close to Christmas.

After the necessary formal AGM business, we had a very knowledgeable glance at the past by Councillor Keith Hoskins MBE. He gave an account of the work of Hitchin Initiative over the past 30 years, with reference to the 2004 Town Centre Strategy (available on the North Herts Council website), and a list of the successes from that, but also with mention of plans which are not yet fulfilled.

Items achieved included the old Post Office sorting site, Crown House and the Ransom site developments. Unfulfilled plans included Churchgate development, the riverside walkway, Paynes Park and The Dell.

Considering that the Council is currently consulting widely on a new North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy (albeit ended on 30th January) this was a timely reminder of the issues. That led to a discussion of the problem of access to the town centre, the transport hubs and the desirability of retaining and maybe extending parking spaces. It was pointed out that signage to the car parks is poor. A suggestion of trying to access the town centre private parking spaces at weekends and evenings was made. A point was also raised about the limitations of bus services – which Keith pointed out is a county council issue and they should be contacted about difficulties experienced.

Charnwood was also mentioned, with the Council having renovated some of the fabric, but now needing a group or business to take on the overall management so that community groups can make use of it. Keith mentioned the recently formed ‘Action Hitchin’ and ‘Hitchin Creatives’ as groups that could be involved.

Keith then mentioned the prospect of a Town Council with the advent of a unitary authority taking over from the district council. Both issues will receive increased attention in the coming months.

Keith was thanked for his leading of a useful discussion.

Mike Clarke – Co-Chair

Luton Airport Update

History

In 2023, Luton Rising applied for a Development Consent Order for plans to expand Luton Airport to enable it to increase capacity from its current maximum permitted 19 million passengers per annum (mppa) to 32 mppa by 2043. Following an Examination in Public, Planning Inspectors advised that consent for the development should be withheld. Their opinion was that the negative harmful environmental effects would outweigh the positive benefits, which centred around a boost to the local economy and jobs. In May last year, the Secretary of State for Transport, Heidi Alexander, nevertheless granted consent on the basis of the business case in the light of the Government’s desire to stimulate economic growth. Luton and District Association for the Control of Aircraft Noise (LADACAN) with the support of donations from individuals and many local groups, including Hitchin Forum, applied for a judicial review.

Judicial Review result

On the 8th December 2025, the High Court rejected LADACAN’s claim on all grounds on which it was based. LADACAN’s lawyers focused on the environmental impact of the proposed development. Some of their arguments ultimately relied on an apparently unrelated Supreme

Court [ruling against Surrey County Council from 2024](#)¹. In that case, developers had sought permission to extract oil from a site near Horsham, and the Supreme Court ruled that it was reasonable to assume that all the oil extracted would ultimately be burnt, with the inevitable resulting CO₂ emissions. That ruling required an environmental impact assessment to take into account all 'downstream' carbon dioxide emissions which could reasonably be expected to result from a development. Subsequently, the ruling was relied upon to require Gatwick Airport to take into account emissions from both outbound and inbound flights in assessing the predicted emissions resulting from its expansion plans.

A significant plank of LADACAN's judicial review case was that the Secretary of State had failed to consider the inbound emissions in making her decision on Luton expansion. The UK carbon budget, in common with those of other countries, does not take into account emissions from inbound flights, and there is therefore no benchmark with which to compare them. Responding to LADACAN's claim in December, the High Court ruled that it was up to the decision maker (i.e. the Minister) to decide the significance of these effects. A factor in the High Court's decision was that, as Gatwick Airport is much larger than Luton, the application of the requirement resulting from the Gatwick ruling was not comparing like with like.

Of other arguments employed by the LADACAN team, its assertion that the airport had failed to assess non-CO₂ emissions from flights (e.g. nitrogen oxides) was rejected on the grounds of scientific uncertainties in the effect of the impact.

The only argument employed by LADACAN which was not based on emissions was whether the £250,000 the airport deemed fit to mitigate the effect of the development on the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty was properly explained under the duties required of it by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The Court ruled that no detailed explanation of every step in calculating the sum was required.

A reasonably detailed yet intelligible discussion of the case, including the importance ascribed to benchmarks (or the lack of them) is available on the [Bristow's website](#)².

At the time of writing, LADACAN is considering whether to appeal against the High Court's decision. Along with the CPRE and other community groups, Hitchin Forum has made a further donation in order to help defray the necessary legal costs.

References

1. R (on the application of Finch on behalf of the Weald Action Group) v Surrey County Council and others:
<https://www.supremecourt.uk/cases/press-summary/uksc-2022-0064>
2. No silent night for LADACAN - court upholds approval for Luton Airport expansion:
<https://inquisitiveminds.bristows.com/post/102lylk/no-silent-night-for-ladacan-court-upholds-approval-for-luton-airport-expansion>

Bill Sellicks – Co-Chair

Planning Matters

Hitchin Forum reviewed the following major planning applications and public consultation. As usual we do not generally get involved with domestic alterations or tree pruning, which make up the majority of the applications.

North Herts Council Planning Application Reference 25/02794/RM: Highover Farm Reserved Matters for Construction of Phase 1

We wrote to the Council on 10th December 2025 objecting to this first phase of this major development on the following grounds:

Even as the first phase of the total 700 homes Highover Farm development, the 236 dwellings involved will have significant impacts on neighbouring parts of Hitchin, which are inadequately mitigated at present. Also, the sequencing of the overall site's construction will mean that families moving into these dwellings will lack basic amenities and not benefit from promised infrastructure improvements for several years.

From 2017, we and others have consistently warned that the local infrastructure, in particular the roads and footpaths leading from the site to Hitchin and Letchworth, is already overburdened by vehicular traffic and, without safe pedestrian and cycle routes, the large numbers of new houses will lead to severe congestion in the surrounding roads, resulting in traffic at a crawl and even standstill, engine noise, fumes from exhausts and production of particulates.

These proposals do not seem to include any of the improvements to roads, footpaths and cycle paths needed to mitigate these effects, particularly beneath the Cambridge Road, Woolgrove Road and Grove Road railway bridges.

We could not see the promised bus vouchers and necessary improvement of frequency of the bus routes serving the site.

This phase of development does not appear to include the promised primary school. Unless the nearest school has the required capacity to accommodate the expected number of new children throughout their primary school experience, they will be subject to unnecessary disruption to their education when they make the transition to the new school.

There appears to be no healthcare provision – a clinic was originally proposed.

There is no shop – again, one was originally proposed.

The house layout looks cramped with houses only about a single door's width apart.

Overall, we expressed our concern that this application does not address serious issues for new and neighbouring residents arising from shortcomings, particularly in the transport network, that have been repeatedly well documented by numerous objectors, including ourselves.

North Herts Council Planning Application Reference 25/02689/PMA: Pease House, Hitchin

This is a conversion to flats of another office block located within the Hitchin Priory site. We noted that the car parking shown on the plans appears to be at a considerable distance from the flats, and it seems likely that people will drive up the footpaths or park in other parking areas or in the street to get nearer. We said that this appears to be a significant defect, which needs resolution prior to approving this application.

Public Consultation 'Icknield Fields' Ickleford: 250 homes and new SEN school to West of A600 below Pound Farm

Another scheme by Bugler Homes, and another proposed development in Ickleford, this was included in Councillor Louise Peace's article in the previous Newsletter No. 188. It is on Green Belt land, and the developer has appealed to the 'Grey Belt' argument to justify its construction. Please see www.icknieldfields.uk for details of the proposals.

Neil Dodds – member of Hitchin Forum Steering Group

Hitchin Forum's Big Spring Clean, Sunday 22nd March

Arrangements are in hand for our next six-monthly clean-up on 22nd March. Interest is high, and in the last few days I have received contact details from three more eager volunteers keen to take part. I am looking at the possibility of adding some new locations to those we have been clearing over recent years, including, for instance, the roadside verge to the north of Priory School along the A600. If you would like to join us, and especially if you have any suggestions for anywhere that needs a bit of TLC, do please let me know by emailing hflitterpick@gmail.com.



Holy Saviour Guides with their haul

Bill Sellicks – Co-Chair

Nature on our doorstep - Hitchin Nature Network and their #12DaysWild

For those of you who are unfamiliar with Hitchin Nature Network and their [Facebook¹](#) and [Instagram²](#) pages, I have outlined below who they are, what they do, when they were first launched and the reason why they came into being.



Hitchin Nature Network

Hitchin Nature Network, concerned by the continuing loss of wildlife across our countryside, is a group of Hitchin residents who want to work with the community with the aim of making the town more wildlife-friendly by means of a community nature project.

According to them, it doesn't matter whether you have a big garden or a mere window box, if you are passionate about your local green spaces big or small you can assist in their work of creating a network of 'miniature nature reserves' in gardens, parks and any viable green spaces. This can be achieved, for example, by planting pollinator-friendly flowers, building ponds and putting up nest boxes as well as letting your grass grow longer to support biodiversity. This action, together with taking part in their organised talks and walks, such as the one that was planned for this January called 'The Winter Tree Walk', contributes to a sense of shared purpose in helping our local nature to recover. You can hear some of the above echoed in their [interview with the BBC³](#), and in the article which appeared [in The Comet⁴](#) shortly after their launch on Hitchin Apple Day (Saturday, 9th October 2021) in the Market Place.

We are all familiar with the twelve days of Christmas and, starting on 25th December 2025 and ending on 5th January 2026, Hitchin Nature Network presented us with a twelve-day #12DaysWild festive nature challenge, promoted by the Wildlife Trusts. See

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/12dayswild>. The aim was to encourage people to do one wild thing each day during the abovementioned dates.

This challenge was run on their Facebook page where Hitchin Nature Network offered some ideas about what people might do to explore winter wildlife in North Hertfordshire. These wild acts could be something as simple as listening to a robin sing or, for example, on **Day 1** of the challenge, people could start by walking off their Christmas dinner by perhaps wandering around the town admiring our green spaces such as Bancroft Gardens and Windmill Hill.

Below is a very brief synopsis, with some photographs, of Hitchin Nature Network's suggestions for the rest of the #12DaysWild challenge. However, as you can imagine, a much fuller, detailed, fact-rich and interesting description is given in each of Hitchin Nature Network's #12DaysWild

Facebook posts themselves. If you haven't viewed these already, I highly recommend you do so or, at the very least, revisit them if you have just skimmed over the posts. That being said, the suggestion for **Day 2** was to keep an eye out for mystical mistletoe on your wanderings. The tree in the adjacent photo is said to be Hitchin's most laden.



Day 3's requirement was to find a holly bush, whose berries provide food for birds in winter. Hitchin Cemetery might be one of the places to look.



After looking out for mistletoe and holly it's not surprising **Day 4** asked people to seek out the less glamorous ivy, which provides shelter for insects as well as food for birds.

Day 5 involved admiring an alder tree, a common sight around Hitchin, where they can be found along our water courses. The photo, right, shows the silhouette of a branch by Ippolyts Brook.



For those looking for a project to keep their children or grandchildren busy, the **Day 6** task was ideal in that it suggested building a bee hotel.




Day 7 wanted you to see if you could spot any plants in flower. In this photo (left) you can spot a Mexican fleabane in flower (similar to a daisy), clinging to the wall by the River Hiz near Tilehouse Street.



The car nearest the tree is about 1.6m high, and the tree appears to be 11 times as high, which makes it 17.6m




Day 8 got you to work on estimating the height of a tree, following the instructions in the photo above, while **Day 9** prompted us to get out and about as you never know what you might see, such as the otter footprints discovered in the snow at Purwell last January.



Wildlife – for the record



150 Years of the Hertfordshire Natural History Society



16 December 2025 – 15 February 2026
in the Arches

North Herts Museum,
Brand Street, Hitchin, SG5 1JE

Open Tuesday to Saturday 10.30am – 4.30pm,
Sunday 11am – 3pm Admission Free

Day 10 encouraged you to visit the exhibition held at North Herts Museum on 150 years of the Hertfordshire Natural History Society, a society that promotes the study and recording of Hertfordshire's wildlife and boasts that Charles Darwin was an honorary member.



Day 11 turned our attention to our hedgerows where we should discover an abundance of old man's beard (the name given to the seed heads of our only wild clematis) as it loves Hitchin's chalky soils. It is sometimes called Devil's Twine due to its vigour.



Finally, on **Day 12** we were posed the question of whether we need decorations when we can go out into nature and purloin the seed heads such as those shown in the adjacent photograph.

Personally, I found this series enjoyable and yes, it did inspire me to get out into nature more. Hopefully, it will have encouraged you to do similar.

Although it is too late for you to take part in Hitchin Nature Network's Winter Tree Walk on 25th January, pictured here, it is worth monitoring their Facebook or Instagram page for future events, examples being Dawn Chorus Walk, Moths & Breakfast, Family Bug Hunt and Bat Walk.



Note: All photographs were reproduced from Hitchin Nature Network's Facebook page with their kind permission.

1. Hitchin Nature Network Facebook page:
<https://www.facebook.com/HitchinNatureNetwork>
2. Hitchin Nature Network Instagram page:
<https://www.instagram.com/hitchinnaturenetwork/>
3. Hitchin Nature Network on the BBC:
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-england-beds-bucks-herts-59251496>
4. Hitchin Nature Network in the Comet:
<https://www.thecomet.net/news/22330792.community-nature-project-set-across-hitchin/>

Valerie Schicker – member of Hitchin Forum Steering Group

Our Tiny Forest – an update

Following on from Valerie's theme of appreciating nature on a small scale, here are some pictures of the so-called tiny forest at Bury Mead Springs on the edge of town. Consisting of about 4000 saplings planted at the density prescribed by the Miyawaki method, the forest was created in early 2022 and has grown rapidly, as predicted, without needing maintenance. Clearly our local natural environment is well-suited to this scheme and these species of trees.

If you are interested in finding out more about tiny forests, Wikipedia would be a good starting point but note that the term used there is 'Pocket Forests'.



Thousands of trees packed into a small (tiny) patch of land



Here you can see where an animal – much smaller than a human – has created a path into the dense thicket.

This is a brilliant environment for birds, insects and other small animals.

Berries are already providing useful food through the winter.



Stuart Howarth – member of Hitchin Forum Steering Group

Town Centre Strategy

Even though the online consultation ended on 30th January, we consider it important to record Hitchin Forum's views on the consultation process being carried out by North Herts Council (NHC), and to encourage everyone to engage with the council's consultation processes. Here is the full response sent by the Steering Group to NHC.

North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy - Draft for Public Consultation

Response by Hitchin Forum – January 2026

Introduction

Hitchin Forum is a community organisation founded in 1992 as a non-political umbrella to bring together people and organisations who want to maintain and enhance Hitchin's special character. It enables the views of people who live and work in Hitchin to be presented in a co-ordinated manner to relevant bodies. Currently we have in excess of 100 members, including community groups and businesses in Hitchin.

Responding to this Consultation

Your Planning Portal has blocked our use for reasons we cannot fathom, hence this response. This does not bode well for general public use of this system and needs addressing.

Overall Assessment of the Draft Town Centres Strategy

In terms of public engagement in the planning process, this is a very difficult document for public comment. It is made unnecessarily complicated by interspersing comment and discussion about the four towns in some parts, while separating more detailed description for the individual towns in other sections. Its clarity and quality are greatly reduced by attempting to deal with four very different and distinctive towns in one document.

Part 3 is headed "Individual Town Centre Strategies" but there is no strategy to be found. Descriptions of a town's "Identity", a "Vision" for the town, a "SWOT Analysis", "Key Priorities" and "Priority Areas" do not make a "Strategy".

It appears to us that the Council has tried to save time and resources to speed up the process by getting consultants to prepare an overarching strategy. It shows. This document is inferior in every way to the 2004 Hitchin Town Centre Strategy. The Council might not need to begin all over again but must create a policy document for each town that does justice to the particular and unique character of each town and builds a policy direction appropriate to each town for the next decade.

Q1: Do you have any comments on 1A: Introduction and context?

See above.

Q2: Do you have any comments on 1B: The Council's Role?

Here it is stated: "The Priority of Responsible Growth directly supports the creation of a new **Town Centres Strategy** for North Hertfordshire.". In fact, its "supporting text" contradicts this:

*“We also want to support economic growth across our district. We will prepare **Town Centre Strategies**...”* This is not a matter of semantics; the two are very different entities.

Q3: Do you have any comments on 1C: Purpose of the Town Centres Strategy?

Para 2 states: “The Town Centres Strategy will provide clear planning policy guidance to support and maintain each town’s unique successful qualities and place identities, and to improve the vitality and viability of each town centre to ensure that change and development occur in a positive way while the Local Plan is under review.”

There are no planning policies evident in this document. The “Guidance Notes” in Part 2B are only *“to support developers, consultants, landowners and decision makers...”*

Q4: Do you have any comments on the Land Use and Retail Evidence?

The second Recommendation provided from the Lichfields 2024 Study is quoted on p.13: “The potential to redistribute capacity from Baldock and Hitchin to Letchworth should be explored...” This does not reflect commercial reality and should be dismissed out of hand.

Q5: Do you have any comments on the Built Environment Evidence?

No comments.

Q6: Do you have any comments on the Transport, Access and Movement Evidence?

We can find no mention of engaging with groups representing those with disabilities. This is particularly an issue regarding the public realm deficiencies in Hitchin that impact wheelchair users and others. This was highlighted in a walk Hitchin Forum arranged into and around the town centre in 2023 with a wheelchair user, the Town Centre Manager and a County Council Transport officer. We expect greater recognition of this as an issue throughout this section.

Hitchin is the commercial and social centre for a hinterland of villages who have no choice overall except to use private cars to get into Hitchin. The Council should be researching the viability of a network of comprehensive public or public/private transport (electric minibuses?) to provide regular and reliable services between Hitchin town centre and these villages. This would reduce pressure on car parking as well as enabling environmental improvements.

Q7: Do you have any comments on the Community Evidence?

No comments.

Q8 - 12: Do you have any comments on Guidance Notes 1 - 5: Promoting Vitality and Viability in Town Centres; The Built Form, Public Realm and Design; Heritage and Historical Character; Promoting Sustainable Travel; Community Facilities?

These appear to be mostly an elaboration of current Local Plan policies which are generalist. These Guidance Notes would be more helpful if they pointed to how they should be interpreted for each town.

Q13: Hitchin – The North Herts Town Centre Strategy sets out an identity and vision for Hitchin Town Centre. Do you think these reflect what makes Hitchin special and what its future should be? Please explain why.

This section is impoverished compared to the 2004 Hitchin Town Centre Strategy. It fails to reference what should be its foundation document: the Conservation Area Character Statement for Hitchin. Most of the “**Identity**” section could describe any market town in Britain. It is a “bird’s eye view” rather than identifying what is unique and special about Hitchin. No doubt this

“blandness” is due to attempting (unsuccessfully) to produce one strategy for four very different towns.

The “**Vision**” section refers to town centre assets in the most general of terms and fails to mention what is probably Hitchin town centre’s greatest visitor attraction: The British Schools Museum is internationally significant and last year hosted in excess of 18,000 visitors. Instead there is bland mention of “museums”. Shame!

Q14: Do you have any comments on the SWOT Analysis for Hitchin (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats)?

Much of what is stated in this Analysis we would support. However, we take issue as follows:

“7. Strength: Most areas of the centre are well-maintained and adequate street furniture is provided.”

Apart from Hermitage Road where pavements were recently re-laid, most areas are neglected with uneven paving, crude repairs in tarmac, areas that flood or puddle in rain, signposts that are rusting, leaning or redundant and street furniture needing painting. The ironwork in the Church Cloisters is a disgrace, as are the railings along the river by Portmill Lane. Moss’s Corner is well-used for sitting etc, despite being ugly and out of character with the rest of the town centre. We could go on.

“9. Strength: The centre has a good bus service, with many bus routes serving the centre.”

See comment to Q.6 above.

“13. Weakness: The choice of retailers is not comparable with some larger centres, which encourages expenditure leakage to centres with a better range of facilities, such as Cambridge, Luton and Stevenage.”

It is commercial nonsense to talk about comparisons with larger centres. Hitchin is a middle-sized market town and is not competing with such centres. It cannot, it does not and it should not. It has its own unique charms, not least due to the fact that it does not, and some would say thankfully, cannot accommodate the large chains.

“16. Weakness: The historic character of the town centre, particularly in terms of the Conservation Area designation and listed buildings could constrain potential redevelopment opportunities. It could restrict the growth of the centre and deter new operators, due to the lack of availability of spaces needed for larger format stores.”

Some would see this as a strength in Hitchin rather than a weakness. There continues to be a healthy turnover of shops; units are rarely empty for long periods. Larger format stores tend to be chain stores which often add blandness rather than diversity or interest.

This is a prime example of why it is mistaken to try to produce a district-wide Town Centres Strategy which cannot, by its very broad-brush stroke nature, address the specific and very different individuality of each town.

“27. Opportunity: A holistic approach to transport and parking may provide opportunities for reconfiguration of provision, whilst maintaining or increasing footfall and vitality.”

See comment to Q.6 above.

“28. Threat: The number of vacant shop units has increased significantly in recent years.”

The Hitchin Town Centre Manager should be consulted re the accuracy or otherwise of this statement.

“29. Threat: The continued polarisation of national multiples in larger centres and/or business failure of more national multiples could lead to the closure of outlets. The continued rationalisation and restructuring of national multiples could lead to the closure of outlets. Multiple operators could seek to focus on (sub-)regional centres such as Stevenage, Cambridge and Luton rather than Hitchin.”

These statements are confusing, contradictory and should be deleted. See comments on 13 & 16 above. It is not the national multiples that draw visitors to Hitchin or define Hitchin’s distinctiveness or attractiveness.

“30. Threat: Transport impacts of growth within and around Hitchin, including Luton Airport, could exacerbate congestion. This could deter town centre visits, given the proximity and capacity of through routes.”

This is probably the greatest threat Hitchin faces today.

Q.15. Do you have any comments on the Key Priorities for Hitchin Town Centre?

This section is unnecessarily impoverished by lack of locational detail. We would reiterate that each town needs its own Town Centre Strategy so location-specific policies can be produced.

Theme D: Transport, access and movement: “In collaboration with HCC, the BID and other stakeholders, the Council will develop a transport strategy for Hitchin that aims to reduce car dependency in the district and promote sustainable modes of travel into and within the town. Note that our recommendation above about regular and dependable (mini)bus transport between Hitchin town centre and surrounding villages should be included under “Action/Planning Considerations”.

We have no comments on the sections about Letchworth (Q. 16-18), Royston (Q.19-21) and Baldock (Q.22-24).

Q.25. Do you consider it useful to have a summary table of the priority areas for each of the town centres? If yes/no, please explain.

As presented, it serves no real purpose as it merely repeats the headings for what has already been presented in greater detail.

Q.26. Do you have any comments on the Council’s further proposed actions? If yes, please select the theme your response relates to: Land Use and Retail, Built Environment, Transport, Access and Movement, and Community.

It is good to see some definite proposals and firm actions (“will incorporate”, “will implement”, “reduce through-traffic”, “reduce traffic speeds” etc etc). For all of these it would be helpful to have included the policies from which these flow.

Q.27. Do you have any comments on the potential funding opportunities and key considerations for NHDC?

It is helpful to have these spelled out.

Q.28. Do you have any comments on the Glossary in the Town Centres Strategy? Have we missed any terms that should be included? If yes, please state the term and explain why it should be added.

No comments.

Q.29. Do you have any further comments on the Town Centres Strategy? If yes/no, please explain.

Yes.

Appendix 3A: Hitchin Town Centre Evidence Notes: Transport, access and movement - Para 2 under Access and movement (p.86).

"Hills around the town centre are also a barrier to cycling, as cycling routes that minimise climbs and avoid steep climbs are preferred." This is utterly dismissive of Hitchin's natural features – we live next to the Chiltern Hills! This is a negative view and implies inaction is OK. What is far more of an issue for cyclists in and around Hitchin town centre is heavy vehicle traffic – both volumes of traffic and the threat from HGV's. This is even more reason for the need for cycling provision.

Appendix 3A: Hitchin Town Centre Evidence Notes: Community – Para 1 (p. 89)

In 2024 The Council issued the following statement:

"We are bringing Charnwood House back into community use . . . Our overriding aim is to breathe a new lease of life into Charnwood House, so that it can be used by local people and community groups, for the benefit of the town and wider district. We are acutely aware of the importance of this building to Hitchin. While bringing it back into use, we also are keen to see the historic elements of Charnwood House retained, so any refurbishment by the successful leaseholder will be sensitive to the special character of the building, in keeping with its Grade II listed status."

This needs to be reflected within the section on "Community".

General Comments:

The final section (Appendix 3) of this document, specifically for our purposes **"3A Hitchin Town Centre Evidence Notes"**, contains some of the most relevant information in the entire document, yet you ask no questions about it.

There is incredibly little reference to Hitchin Market, despite it being a key feature in the town centre and fundamental to Hitchin's character. This is a major failing and yet another illustration of how depending on planning consultants can lead to totally missing the point.

Ellie Clarke – on behalf of Hitchin Forum Steering Group

Notice Board

Health Walks Timetable

The Health Walks timetable for January to April 2026 is available online. Just search for 'Hertfordshire Health Walks Timetable' and navigate to the North Herts timetable, which is available as a pdf file.

The Triangle Community Garden

Keep up to date with what's planned for the coming months at the very lively Triangle Community Garden. Visit...

<https://trianglegarden.org/events/>

CPRE Lunch and Learn

CPRE Lunch and Learns are a series of online presentations and discussions on the key planning issues that matter to our county. The talks typically run from 1 pm to 2 pm; details can be found at:

<https://www.cpreherts.org.uk/get-involved/lunch-and-learn/>

Please note there is a joining fee – which is reduced for members of CPRE.

The next two events open to non-members are:

- 11th February: The Year Ahead in Planning: What to expect
- 11th March: Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation: What does it mean for Hertfordshire's countryside?

Dates for your Diary

Hitchin Councillor Surgeries. Hitchin Market Place.	10.30 am to 12 noon	First Saturday of every month.
Litter pick.	10 am to 12 noon	Sunday, 22 nd March
Hitchin Community Forum. Details can be found at: https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/community-forums	6.45 pm for 7 pm start	Tuesday, 10 th March