

NEWSLETTER

March - April 2026

No. 190

Thoughts from the Co-Chair

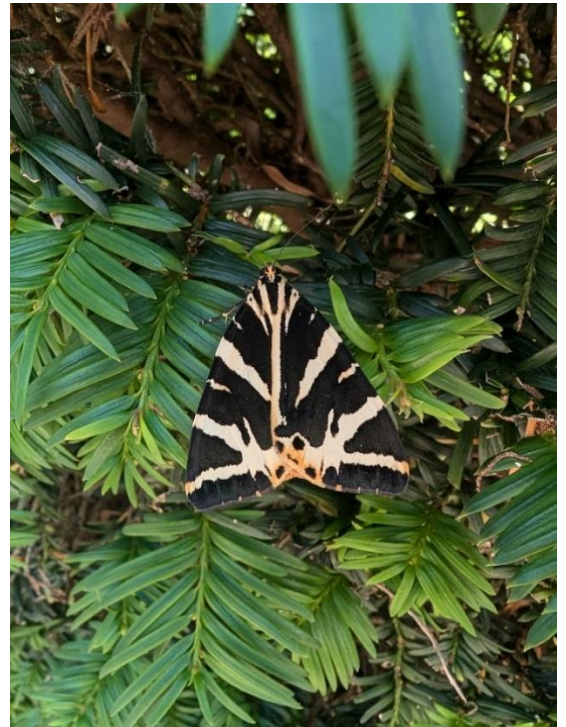
Think global, act local. Unfortunately thinking about the war is a very depressing area at present. To lift the gloom a little just read below about some of our local activities – they are inspiring!

The Triangle Community Garden is a wonderful example of bringing people together “to help boost biodiversity, increase wellbeing and strengthen resilience in our community”. They have been present at Ransom’s Recreation Ground for 25 years. They are partly based on the allotments (saved from a council plan to build on it over 30 years ago, just before Hitchin Forum was formed) and run a number of gardening clubs and other activities. Their aims and activities are described. In their 25th anniversary year they are crowdfunding - with the help of matched funding before 15th April - to support their various gardening clubs, the details of which are in the article.

Hitchin Cemetery is a nice place to stroll. Valerie attended the ‘Friends of Hitchin Cemetery’ 10th anniversary and provides a history of their work. And there is more life there than immediately meets the eye... a colourful moth once caught my eye...

Phil Barron helpfully identified this exotic specimen for me – a Jersey tiger moth. He is one of the volunteers that meet and work there each week. He also offers a fascinating blog of all the other plants and creatures that lurk and wait to be discovered there. Find out more and explore it yourself!

Ellie gives us a quick update following the recent consultation about the draft Town Centres Consultation Strategy and then we explore some of the messier parts of our area. The latest Big Spring Clean on 22nd March attracted 140 volunteers who filled 100 bags of litter! The coordinator was again Bill, who writes below about the day. Well done to him and all who joined in!



Bill follows that with a partial confession, realising his sin of the past in having a wood burning stove! But he has repented and now provides the science which is being accumulated about this particulate plague. I confess to having an occasional wood burning open fire, which does cause me some mental anguish...

Neil provides a run down on the various planning issues which are afflicting Hitchin. He is meticulous in examining new or revised planning applications, commenting on them and getting our Steering Group to look harder at the issues raised, before submitting our views to the council.

So read on, be inspired, join in our local activities, and just hope the global mess is quickly sorted.

But first, Luton Airport:

Mike Clarke – Co-Chair

Luton Airport Update

As members will know, LADACAN's case against Luton Airport expansion was dismissed by the High Court in December. LADACAN has now been granted a two-day hearing at the Court of Appeal in May, where its application to appeal the dismissal, and the grounds of the appeal itself, will be considered. The Court of Appeal will also consider the opposing arguments made by the Secretary of State and by Luton Rising.

The assessing judge has indicated that the merits or otherwise of the appeal need to be considered because they raise relevant points of law.

If the judge rules in LADACAN's favour, Luton Rising may need to revise relevant parts of its Environmental Impact Assessment.

Bill Sellicks – Co-Chair

The Triangle Garden celebrates its 25th anniversary.

'A safe place to learn, grow and be' is one of the many positive messages on display at an exhibition at North Herts Museum to mark the 25th anniversary of the Triangle Community Garden. For a quarter of a century the Triangle Garden has been bringing people of all ages and abilities together through the joy of gardening, creativity and nature at Ransoms Recreation Ground in Hitchin.

As part of the celebrations, a £5k Crowdfunder campaign has also been launched to support the charity's various garden clubs – these are the volunteers, led by a member of staff, who help keep nature thriving at the community gardens.

Vicky Wyer, chair of trustees and founder, said: "It's brilliant to see our work celebrated at the museum – last month our Growing Ability gardeners visited, and the pride on their faces to see themselves portrayed in the displays was wonderful. We're really grateful to everyone who helped put this exhibition together and to the museum for this opportunity. Being able to give visibility to the nature connection work we do, but also to our diverse and often underrepresented community, is invaluable."



Growing Ability gardeners gather outside North Herts Museum.

The free exhibition, entitled 'Connecting, Growing and Enjoying Nature for 25 years', at the museum in Brand Street, runs until 12th April. It is filled with photographs, stories and a film that highlights the milestones, activities and events over the years, from growing food and tending plants to creating wildlife habitats, learning new skills and discovering the natural world.

The 25th anniversary celebrations also include plans for new swathes of wildflower planting, diverse woodland edge habitat and new benches and bug hotels across Ransoms Rec. In addition to seasoned volunteers and Growing Ability gardeners, the exhibition highlights the involvement of younger people through projects like the Family Forest School, Triangle Tribe, and Sunday Garden Club, which is a monthly family-friendly community gardening session. This spring and summer young people living in temporary accommodation at Anderson House, and volunteers from local

businesses are helping to transform the central area of the recreation ground with new tree and shrub planting.

Harrison Clarke, a 23-year-old job seeker, expressed his gratitude for the opportunities that Triangle's Friday Garden Club has given him after he joined last June. He had been unemployed since completing a four-year IT course at a college in Stevenage in 2024.

“My dad was walking past the park one day and saw people in the garden club and said I should apply. I never really knew much about gardening, but since I started, I’ve been learning about plants and nature and gaining new skills. Talking to people and socialising makes you feel good. I’ve been on day trips with the volunteers to the Cambridge Botanical Gardens. I would encourage other young people to join,” said Harrison, who goes to the Garden Club on a Friday and volunteers at a charity shop on other days in the week.

As well as its Garden Clubs, the Triangle Garden has an expanding programme of workshops and courses aimed at building community resilience through a combination of skills, creativity, mindfulness and learning together. Workshops include Veg Growing, Plants for Free, Foraging, Basketry, Creative Mosaic, Slow Stitch, and 'Skill Up Sister' which delivers DIY skills for women, along with 'Man Made Meals' which aims to boost confidence in the kitchen among men. These are open to all and have concessionary places to include those on low incomes.



Friday Garden Club members visit the museum to see the displays.

The charity also runs a number of social, therapeutic, horticulture and health and wellbeing projects, aimed at people with additional needs and those facing isolation in the community. These are funded either through social care resources or from grants and donations. However, there is no such financial help for the charity's garden clubs – these are funded primarily through fundraising events and sales of plants - but more help is needed. A £5k crowdfunding campaign has been launched to help with ongoing costs.

Volunteer Fiona Dolman, a director at a public health body and one of the organisers of the exhibition, said: “The fact that the garden club is growing is fantastic. It would not exist without volunteers, but we have a funding gap that needs to be met.” She added: “Joining the garden club in 2018 was one of the best things I’ve done in my life. I would describe it as the place where I feel really safe and supported, and I’m always looking forward to seeing my friends. It is so good for you being outdoors in good company and making things grow. It is joyous.”



Residents of One YMCA temporary accommodation and volunteers from local business Ransoms Naturals plant trees together in Ransoms Rec this spring.

This is a sentiment shared by fellow exhibition organiser and engineer Mariana Mercado, who is from Argentina and lives in Hitchin. She joined the garden club in 2017.

“I thought if I joined the club I would start learning about gardening in this country. I didn’t know much about what plants to grow in the weather here, which is completely different from the subtropical climate in the north of Argentina. I also didn’t feel quite right in my mind at the time, so I needed something to ground me. What I found at the club was a human connection and a space that everyone in the community of all ages could enjoy.”

Other volunteers agreed. Luiza, who is from Brazil but has lived in Hitchin for 18 years, signed up a year ago. “It was a birthday present to myself, and I couldn’t be happier – everyone makes you feel so welcome.”

Among them is Lesley from Stevenage, who often makes amazing cakes to share with other volunteers when they stop for tea after the session ends on Friday mornings. “When I come along, I learn so much. If you don’t know something about a plant, you can easily ask somebody else, and no one minds. I think it is a great club for people to join,” she said.

For more information about the Triangle Community Garden go to www.trianglegarden.org .

To donate to the Garden Club Crowdfunder visit www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/garden-club .

For details about the exhibition go to www.northhertsmuseum.org .

Vicky Wyer – member of Hitchin Forum

History and Nature together on our doorstep - Friends of Hitchin Cemetery 10-Year Anniversary

I recently had the privilege of being invited to the Friends of Hitchin Cemetery's 10-year celebration. This was held at the Chapel in the centre of Hitchin Cemetery, St John's Road, during the morning of Friday 13th February. Although the previous day had been wet and windy, good fortune was with us weather-wise, regardless of the ominous date.

Also partaking in this event were representatives of North Herts Council Greenspace Team, a local councillor, the cemetery manager, Hitchin Historical Society, Countryside Management Service, the Town Centre Manager, Herts at War, plus members of the Friends' group. A motley crew indeed!



The format of the celebration involved a presentation by Derek Burness (left) on the history of the group and Phil Barron (right) on the natural history of the cemetery.

This was followed by a short tour of the older part of the cemetery, with Phil explaining the work of the Friends, who initially concentrated on topiary but later expanded into broader gardening activities to enhance the interest and colour of the space, thus making it more attractive to visit.

Prior to his presentation, Derek Burness thanked everyone for attending and indicated that he, along with Veronica Gardner and Alison Eva, were the original remaining members of the Friends. Another original member, called Betty, had retired a couple of years ago at age 90 and had received a long service award for volunteering with the Countryside Management Service (CMS) and Friends of Hitchin Cemetery (FOHC).

Interestingly, Heidi Hutton on behalf of CMS was able to confirm in her comments at the close of the event, that the Friends of Hitchin Cemetery had contributed an amazing 8,304 volunteer

hours since the group began, an equivalent to more than four full years of full-time work, and valued by the Office for National Statistics in monetary terms as around £120,000. There were 685 volunteer-hours completed in 2025 alone. Heidi went on to add that the value extended beyond the monetary in ways that were not measurable. For example, the added plants and flowers are enjoyed by visitors and also benefit wildlife. Currently FOHC, which is affiliated to CMS, numbers eight volunteers who meet every Friday at 10 am.



The adjacent photo illustrates how the grave of Hitchin dignitary George Gainsford has been improved with planting advice from Nic Wilson - a local nature writer - thus making a visit to the cemetery more appealing.

It seems that the idea to manage the oldest part of Hitchin Cemetery was first introduced in January 2012 when a proposal was put to the Hitchin Area Committee that culminated in the development of a five-year plan to achieve this aim. However, as is generally known locally, the origins of the FOHC arose primarily out of volunteers working for the Countryside Management Service attending a topiary course at the cemetery, run by a Japanese-trained expert. The course took place in October 2015 and inspired course members met up again in February 2016 to begin working at the cemetery on a regular basis, thus forming FOHC. The following month

an official launch took place attended by all interested parties, which was reported on by the [Comet newspaper](#)¹.

Over the years FOHC has grown into a committed and highly skilled team. CMS provides them with the necessary equipment and regular training to ensure the group has first aid skills and works safely with its tools, as well as having appropriate insurance cover. CMS also writes the Cemetery's [Greenspace Action Plan](#)² on behalf of North Herts Council, and this guides the activities of the FOHC. See pages 17 to 33 of the action plan.



The above link also provides a conservation leaflet of Hitchin Cemetery as depicted left and if anyone is interested in volunteering with CMS, the following card provides the relevant information.



In June 2019, there were a number of initiatives in the East and South-East to protect pollinators, which included a major campaign for bee conservation to address the “June Gap” food shortage. Such initiatives were often linked to movements like ‘No Mow May’, with the aim of providing vital food and habitats for bees, butterflies and other insects amidst a national decline in pollinator populations. FOHC were more than proud to be featured on the 28th of that month in the BBC news programme Look East for their efforts in supporting pollinators. In particular, the news segment highlighted their work in transforming parts of the cemetery into a wildlife-friendly area by allowing grass and wildflowers to grow. Derek recalls that Veronica and Betty were the star attractions whilst he had the minor role of planting a wildflower that subsequently died!

Importantly, in July 2021, Phil Barron joined the group and introduced the Friends to the insects and flora of the cemetery. On 2nd September of that year Phil published the first of his well-received Hitchin Cemetery blogs, the latest of which can be [found here](#)³.

Phil has been described more than once as a knowledgeable and super naturalist by members of Hitchin and Letchworth local RSPB group of which I am a member, and I dare say many others subscribe to this description of him.

FOHC achieved more milestones in 2022, which saw CPRE (Campaign to Protect Rural England) present them with a Bronze standard award, as part of the CPRE annual Countryside Awards to celebrate projects that enrich, support, and protect local rural environments and communities. Furthermore, on Friday 13th May 2022, the first ever Hitchin Cemetery tour was introduced. This has been a popular event ever since with four, usually over-subscribed, public tours taking place each year and, more recently, a private tour for Hitchin Historical Society. You may remember that I attended one of these public cemetery tours which I later described in my article - page 7 of the [Hitchin Forum newsletter 176](#)⁴ September/October 2023. For your interest, the provisional dates for this year’s tours are: Friday 1st May at 10.30 am; Sunday 7th June at 2 pm; Friday 3rd July at 10.30 am and Sunday 26th July at 2 pm. I believe you can sign up for the summer tours as part of Hitchin Festival.

Although the group continues to perform topiary, general gardening, litter picking and encourages wildlife by providing bird and bat boxes, bee hotels, and marking areas important for wildflowers, FOHC has, over the years, also taken an interest in the history of the cemetery, as is demonstrated in the content of their free-of-charge spring and summer cemetery tours. Indeed, when they were invited to set up a stall at Hitchin Historical Society's History Day in July 2023, this precipitated even more research into the history of the cemetery. One outcome of this was the setting up of a spreadsheet of all the war dead, either buried or commemorated in the cemetery, currently totalling 121. In order to find these war graves easily, the spreadsheet contains their what-3-words locations. Furthermore, Phil Barron is presently working on the production of a booklet about the history of the cemetery, which is definitely something one should look out for.



The abovementioned booklet will also have input from Bridget Howlett of Hitchin Historical Society. Bridget, in her recent notes on Hitchin Cemetery which she kindly sent me, mentions George Beaver, a Hitchin surveyor, who in March 1856, was asked to prepare a schedule of how the proposed cemetery would be divided between consecrated ground for Church of England burial and unconsecrated ground for Nonconformists. However, when the chosen architect submitted his plans these were rejected by the Bishop of Rochester whose Diocese Hitchin was in at that time. It seems the bishop feared that the required two chapels, if built under one roof, as intended, would result in services in the Church of England chapel being disrupted by ceremonies in the other. However, he was prepared to consecrate the cemetery without chapels as long as some sort of shelter was provided. Thus, the Anglican part of the cemetery was consecrated in April 1857 using a tent.

Nevertheless, the cemetery did get its two chapels as, in 1861, the Burial Board, appointed by Hitchin Vestry, applied to the Diocesan architect Joseph Clarke for plans for the chapels. These were subsequently constructed by George Jeeves of Hitchin. This story was regaled by one of the Friends during our tour of the cemetery where we were able to look upon the headstone of the aforesaid George Beaver (see photo above left).



After the short tour of the older part of the ceremony, led by Phil, everyone returned to the chapel for light refreshments, whereupon a group photograph was taken (see [NHC press release](#)⁵) and thanks given by CMS to the various people and bodies that have supported the Friends over the years.

Excitingly, the following news was also shared: the cemetery is to be assessed for a Green Flag award - an international accreditation given to publicly accessible parks and open spaces.

Note: All photographs were taken by the author, and permission was received by those people appearing in the photos to include their images.

Acknowledgements

- Phil Barron and Derek Burness of the Friends of Hitchin Cemetery
- Heidi Hutton of Countryside Management Service
- Bridget Howlett of Hitchin Historical Society; for passing on and allowing me to use their notes in order to write this piece.

References

1. Comet article:
<https://www.thecomet.net/news/22420072.hitchin-cemetery-rejuvenated-following-volunteer-work-friends-group/>
2. Greenspace Action Plan:
<https://www.bishopsstortfordtc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/committees/agendas/EPA250707%20Agenda%20and%20Attachements%2007%20Jul%2025.pdf>
3. Phil Barron's blog:
<https://hitchinwildlife.blogspot.com/2026/04/hitchin-cemetery-jan-mar-2026.html>
Hitchin Forum newsletter NL176:
<https://www.hitchinforum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Hitchin-Forum-Newsletter-Sept-Oct-2023-NL176.pdf>
4. NHC press release:
<https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/news/ten-years-wildlife-success-celebrated-hitchin-cemetery>

Any errors and/or omissions are entirely mine.

Valerie Schicker – member of Hitchin Forum Steering Group

Town Centres Strategy Update

The consultation for the North Herts Town Centres Strategy closed on 30th January 2026. We received no response or acknowledgement from North Herts Council for our submission, but they did write to the Town Centre Manager as follows:

“We have received circa 100 comments to the Town Centres Strategy which will require time and resources in analysing and understanding the extent of the comments in terms of reviewing the Strategy and how these could be taken forward in a delivery plan.

“So that we can fully engage with yourselves in preparing, shaping and implementing a Delivery Plan for the North Herts Town Centres Strategy, we will need to concentrate our resources initially on analysing the comments received to the consultation draft, and aligning these with comments received from yourselves as key partners regarding Part 3 on the key priorities for each town centre. This will help shape the Delivery Plan, and align it with the

Economic Development Strategy, where the Council is also looking at its Economic Development Team resources through its budget process for next financial year.

"The consultation analysis we anticipate will take a couple of months given available resources and balancing other project commitments."

An update by council officers to those attending North Herts Council's Hitchin Community Forum held at Hitchin Town Hall on 10th March 2026 indicated that the Town Centres Strategy was to be delayed to give officers the time needed to go over the responses. Officers report that they will seek contributions to the Delivery Plan in the Spring. Hopefully, Hitchin Forum will be invited to be involved in those discussions.

Ellie Clarke – member of Hitchin Forum

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

In spite of a chilly start, an estimated 140 volunteer litter pickers turned out for Hitchin Forum's Big Spring Clean on Sunday 22nd March. Over 15 areas in the town were cleared. Early estimates are that about 100 bags of litter were collected in total. Volunteers are keen to recycle where they can and often take recyclables home to put in their grey bins, so it's not possible to be sure of an exact figure.

The event saw the return of former Hitchin resident, Chris Hall, who has recently moved to Wisbech, but finds it hard to stay away. Chris comes armed with a range of exotic litter pickers, one of which is 10 ft long, and which he used to good effect on King George's Playing Field to extract long term rubbish from hedgerows and small trees. He brings the added benefit of the offer to supply other volunteers with litter pickers, which we would have struggled to do with our higher-than-average numbers this year. His range of litter pickers includes ones which could probably be used by children as young as three. As I've said before, a small and growing army of unsung local heroes work on their own areas every week. Some have enrolled on North Hertfordshire's 'Adopt an Area' scheme, and it is increasingly common to see people brandishing litter pickers around the town – an encouraging sign. Our volunteers continue to be disappointed to find items that could be seriously damaging to the environment if not recycled responsibly (a car battery



Pictures by Chris Hall and other members of the litterpick teams.

this time) or could yield useful materials (a television). An interesting find, which demonstrates the persistence of packaging in the environment, was a Walkers crisp packet from 1992.

On behalf of the Forum, and the town, a big 'thank you' again goes to Holy Saviour Guides for their work on the Dell, the 3rd Hitchin Cubs on Ransom's Recreation Ground, and members of Hitchin Tennis Club on Bancroft. Thanks also to our new Town Centre Manager, Danny Pearson, his front of house staff and the team of Rangers who help us to distribute the equipment and provide cheerful encouragement. North Hertfordshire Council contractors dealt with the extra material collected.

If you would like to take part in the Forum's autumn event in October, please email hflitterpick@gmail.com – the date will be announced soon.

Bill Sellicks – Co-Chair

More on the health impacts of wood burning stoves

This article provides an update following the Forum's response to the government's consultation on burning solid fuels which was circulated to members in February. These additional details are prompted by an article which appeared in the British Medical Journal (BMJ) on 7th March 2026¹.

Like a number of members, I own a wood burning stove. The stove was installed in 2011 to provide a focal point in our lounge. Although our poorly insulated 1920s home has always been cold, the stove was never intended to be a primary source of heat. It made a part of the lounge warmer. We enjoyed using it and guests liked it. It was a discretionary purchase made for aesthetic reasons. I probably rationalised the purchase by telling myself that burning wood utilised a renewable resource and therefore reduced the amount of gas we used for heating. I considered commercially dried logs expensive, so I used wood from a variety of sources – a lot from our garden - some of which was almost certainly damp and unsuitable for use.

The stove was purchased at about the time of the declaration of Hitchin's first Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) in Stevenage Road. The issue with that was the exceedance of the Air Quality Objective (AQO) for nitrogen dioxide of 40µg/m³ (micrograms per cubic metre) of air at several points on the hill approaching the Three Moorhens roundabout, largely attributed to slow-moving heavy lorries during peak hours. At the time, there was relatively little discussion about particulates, but it was not long before particulate levels were being reported on Stevenage Road, although they never exceeded statutory limits. During the ensuing period, measurement technology improved, enabling the dangers of particulates to be more carefully studied. The [World Health Organisation](#)² observed in 2021 that 'studies in high-income countries with relatively clean air have reported adverse effects at much lower levels than had previously been studied.' Due to their small size, PM_{2.5} have the ability to enter the blood stream via the lungs and may accumulate in other organs. They are implicated in a host of conditions including asthma, COPD, heart disease, lung cancer and stillbirth.

Our stove is still on the Defra approved list and according to the [Chief Medical Officer's Report of 2022](#)³, would emit about 335g of fine particulates (PM_{2.5}) per MWh of heat produced. The comparable figure for an open fire is 2950g, a non-approved stove (now banned from sale, but may still be used) 2660g, and a gas central heating boiler 0.72g in producing the same amount of heat. Manufacturers and retailers choose to compare Defra approved stoves with open fires and non-approved stoves because they are massively less polluting. They do not refer to gas boilers or electrically fired boilers (which emit no particulates at all in use). It should be borne in

mind that, for electricity, there will be emissions of particulates at power stations depending on which fuel is used to generate that electricity. Nuclear, wind and solar sources will produce almost no fine particulates in the generation process. Coal is a big producer of fine particulates, but there are no longer any active coal fired power stations in the UK. The last was closed in 2024.

In the Forum's submission to the government's consultation, we detailed the ways in which the industry used selective figures to imply the green credentials of wood burners, not least by using its own accreditation system to suggest that fine particulate emissions were minimised by so-called 'eco stoves' without providing any comparison with gas or electric alternatives. The recent BMJ article goes further, revealing that the Stove Industry Association (SIA) had threatened legal action against 8 London Boroughs after they had run an advertising campaign publicising the dangers of wood burners. The Advertising Standards Authority took no action over the campaign, and the SIA didn't take legal action. Just the threat may have been enough to make local authorities cautious, however. The BMJ article quotes a spokesperson for Camden Council as saying "It's had quite a detrimental effect on local authorities' confidence. There's a degree of worry about what happens if we are challenged, even if we're confident that the science backs up what we are saying." The BMJ sent freedom of information requests to the 50 local authorities which have the highest number of wood-burning stoves. In total 15 had received emails from the SIA, including letters threatening legal action, as well as press releases about the supposed (and entirely unevicenced) beneficial effects of wood burning.

There is a parallel here with the tactics used by developers to force planning authorities to grant permission for unsuitable developments by threatening legal action. The trend for wealthy and powerful individuals and organisations to manipulate cash-strapped local authorities by the threat of court action undermines democracy. The SIA challenges medical evidence on the health effects of wood burners claiming that the research uses data from low-income countries. This is untrue – the BMJ article cites a 2023 US study of over 50,000 non-smoking women found that using wood burning stoves or open fireplaces for more than 30 days each year was associated with a 68% rise in lung cancer risk.

I believe in evidence rather than unsubstantiated assertion, and the evidence strongly suggests that by continuing to use my wood burner I am contributing to a problem for others who may be vulnerable and damaging my own health in the process. The evidence leads me to believe that in buying the stove, I made a mistake. It still looks quite attractive, but I won't be lighting it again. The remaining logs will slowly rot to provide an insect habitat in my rewilding area.

1. The Growing Health Threat of Domestic Wood Burning Stoves – and the Industry's Legal Attempts to Shut Down Clean Air Campaigns. Sophie Borland:
British Medical Journal 7th March 2026.
2. World Health Organisation Air Quality Guidelines 2021:
<https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/551b515e-2a32-4e1a-a58c-cdaecd395b19/content>
3. Chief Medical Officer's Annual Report 2022; Air pollution:
<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/639aeb81e90e0721889bbf2f/chief-medical-officers-annual-report-air-pollution-dec-2022.pdf>

Bill Sellicks – Co-Chair

Planning Matters

This is a summary of the most significant planning applications currently under review and scrutiny.

Planning Application 25/03147/FP

Hitchin Storage Centre, Cadwell Lane. Erection of a second layer of storage units (17 additional units) for self-storage above existing storage units.

We objected to the above proposal, for the following reasons. We had already objected to an upper layer when the scheme was first proposed.

- On the grounds of appearance and size.
- On the grounds of disturbance to neighbours by both noise and lighting, noting that access will be available 7am to 8pm 7 days a week.
- On the grounds of safety to users of the upper units, who will have to gain access unaided via mobile stairs, with no staff on site.

Planning Application 25/03234/FP

Land East of Bedford Road and North of Priory School, Hitchin

The land concerned is Green Belt under the only recently approved 2011-2031 Local Plan. The applicant has claimed that it can be developed as 'Grey Belt', however we believe that this would apply only where the local authority has not designated enough sites to fulfil its five-year projected need for housing. In the case of Hitchin this can hardly apply when on the east side of the town the Highover development alone involves 700 new dwellings, while developments on the west side of town number over 200.

We noted the proximity to Ickleford, and the nearby development IC2 of Burford Grange, just over the Bedford Road and River Oughton. Within the village an application has been made for up to 100 dwellings on land south of Turnpike Lane – just over the river from the proposed site. This is of course what the Green Belt was set up to avoid – loss of separation and identity of town and village.

Regarding traffic, in addition to cars from Burford Grange, which involves 40 dwellings, some 19 dwellings have been built at "Ickleford Manor" at the intersection of the A600 with Turnpike Lane. Further up Bedford Road, site IC3 to the east would involve 150 dwellings and planning is being sought for up to 250 dwellings at "Icknield Fields" to the west of the A600. Current extensive developments in Lower Stondon and beyond will generate even more traffic on the Bedford Road.

We did however welcome the developer's stated intention to provide 50% affordable homes.

Planning Application 26/00006/FP

50 New Homes between Kingshott School and Ash Brook, Hitchin

We considered the promotion of this land for development to be incorrect. The land concerned is Green Belt under the recently approved 2011-2031 Local Plan.

The proposed development involves loss of open landscape and increased sprawl from Hitchin towards Little Wymondley – what the Green Belt was supposed to avoid. If this plan goes ahead we may well see applications for infill between Hitchin and Kingshott School.

The site is isolated, without facilities and would require residents to use their cars to travel to Hitchin or Stevenage. For these residents the scheme would involve severe traffic problems at the intersection with the A602. This is a very difficult and hazardous junction, especially for those wishing to turn right towards Hitchin. Considering the speed of traffic that travels along the bypass, serious accidents would be highly likely unless significant changes were made to the junction.

Planning Application 26/00262/FP

New dwelling on land at New Pound Farm to the east side of Old Hale Way

We objected to the proposed single dwelling for the following reasons:

- Building a dwelling would increase urbanization and serve to reduce the already very small separation between Hitchin and Ickleford.
- We are concerned that this is only one of a number of applications which are being made for this location, the cumulative effect of which requires them to be considered together.

Planning Application 26/00574/S106

Temporary Footpath at Highover

Currently under review

Planning Application 26/00393/FP

Nine new dwellings in place of The Firs Hotel, Bedford Road

Site preparation includes the demolition of the existing disused hotel building and alteration and uprating of cross-overs and access points to the site onto Bedford Road and Firs Close.

The proposed development comprises 9 x 3-bedroom new family residences in a terrace format, each with private off-street car parking for two cars and private rear gardens, double EV charging points, private cycle stores, air-source heatpump enclosures and shared bin stores. The proposed two rows of dwellings run parallel to Bedford Road. The first row faces Bedford Road

and comprises four dwellings. A further five dwellings are set back from the highway and sit adjacent to the existing terrace of houses at the rear of Firs Close.

Members of the Steering Group had no objections to this application.

Planning Application 26/00631/RM

55 dwellings on the site of Ickleford Mill, formerly Bowman's Mill

We have received a letter from NHC Planning asking for our comments on the latest proposals for the site of Bowman's Mill, for 55 dwellings of which 40% are affordable.

We have previously commented on the main application - we were in favour of this scheme principally because the housing is on the site of the Mill – that is, a rare brownfield site, and the meadow South of the River is retained.

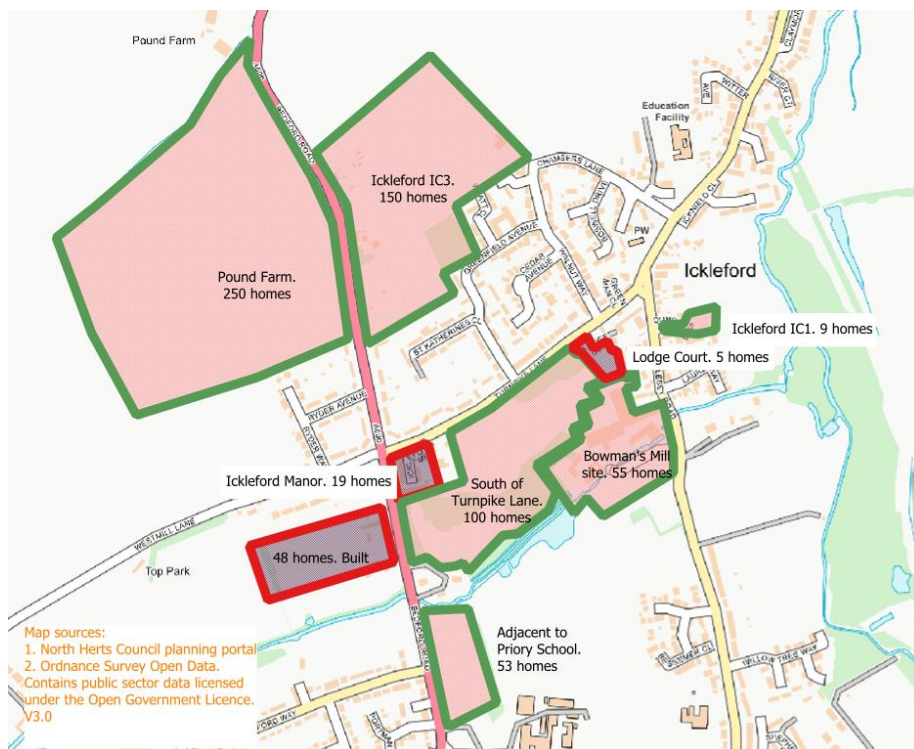
However, this development now promises to tie-in with the recently suggested site south of Turnpike Lane:

Planning Application 25/02401/OP

Up to 100 dwellings on land south of Turnpike Lane, Ickleford

This concerns the erection of up to 100 dwellings with means of access from Turnpike Lane including associated landscaping, drainage, car parking, infrastructure and all ancillary and enabling works following demolition of all existing structures (all matters reserved except means of access).

This site is adjacent to the northern and western boundaries of the Mill site. Although it is still an outline application (currently being determined), it is important to think about how the two sites could be connected. Also, the cumulative effect of cars from the Mill site, the Land South of Turnpike Lane and others in Ickleford currently being considered.



Map showing the current developments surrounding Ickleford. Those edged in red are already built or are under construction.

Neil Dodds – member 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.

Four and Twenty Blackbirds

Hitchin Forum is delighted to host a presentation by Hitchin author, editor and Guardian Country Diarist, Nic Wilson on Tuesday 21st July at 7.30pm in the Lucas Room at Hitchin Town Hall. 'Four and Twenty Blackbirds' will explain how to create a bird-friendly garden that sings in every season. Land Beneath the Waves, Nic's first book, was published last year to wide acclaim, and there will doubtless be a chance to ask questions both about her talk and her book during the event.

Tickets will cost £5, and all proceeds will go to Hitchin's Triangle Garden Community.

Find out more about Nic and her many activities and interests by visiting her website <https://nicwilson.co.uk/>.

Dates for your Diary

Hitchin Councillor Surgeries. Hitchin Market Place.	10.30 am to 12 noon	First Saturday of every month.
Autumn Litter pick.	10 am to 12 noon	Date in October to be advised
Talk by Nic Wilson: 'Four and Twenty Blackbirds'. Lucas Room at Hitchin Town Hall.	7.30 pm	Tuesday 21 st July

Stop press!

Congratulations to Hitchin Forum member Robin Dartington for his award of excellence from the High Sheriff of Hertfordshire. This is in recognition of his creation of Buzzworks in Old Hale Way and his invention of the Dartington Long Deep Hive (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beehive>).

Well done Robin!

