

NEWSLETTER

July - August 2026

No. 192

Thoughts from the Co-Chair

This was supposed to be a short newsletter, but life moves on, unfortunately not for the HGVs, and Churchgate is once again being discussed in higher places...

Take a close look at Bill's comments on the Health Impact Report concerning HGVs and the metal recycling sites – a subject which needs action by North Herts Council and the Environment Agency.

Ellie has waded through some of the Council's documents about the Churchgate development. Nothing concrete (or brick) yet, but some hard work has been done, with more to come. How much that will be affected by the local government reorganisation, now that we are to be part of the Central Hertfordshire Council, remains to be seen.

I have experienced some exhaustion caused by the hot weather and attending so many brilliant events in the Hitchin Festival (but I don't believe the Flanders and Swann song about mud mud cooling the blood is worth trying). Our meeting where Nic Wilson – pictured right - talked about supporting birds in our gardens was fascinating. Inspired by her and the fly-bys of swifts this summer, I have contacted HitchinSwiftAction who say they will put some swift nest boxes under our eaves! Swifts need nest sites and we love them.

And yes, we do want feedback on newsletters – do you read them, what would be more attractive and informative for you and others? We would also like to know if you visit the website, and how easy it is to find subjects you are interested in. Our Facebook pages seem to attract attention, but is that from members? I suspect that our Twitter page does not get much attention, and maybe it is time to move to Bluesky. Let us know your thoughts.



Mike Clarke – Co-Chair

The Hitchin Industrial Estate Health Impact Assessment – Limitations and Missed Opportunities

This is a summary of a document which Hitchin Forum has shared with Hitchin Councillors and our MP Alistair Strathern in response to the Health Impact Assessment (HIA). The HIA is a long document, published earlier this year. It was the result of engagement with 286 members of the local community – evidence, if any were needed, of the serious concern with which the impact of the activities of the waste sites is viewed by residents. Due to the complexity of the document, we focused on the issues that 27% of respondents, and the HIA itself, identified as having the greatest impact – those associated with lorry traffic. A link to the HIA and the document we sent to our Councillors and MP are available on the Forum's website.

Overall, the Forum sees the HIA as a missed opportunity. To a significant extent, we believe that is due to the methodology adopted, failure to consider factors which are relevant, and simple errors - in some cases reflecting lack of familiarity with local geography.

We identified 8 shortcomings of the HIA in total, some of which I will mention here. In terms of the methodology, whilst a speed survey was carried out, it was confined to Wilbury Way. Significantly, it did highlight the contempt with which drivers of vehicles of all types seem to regard the 30mph limit but overall was of limited use in addressing speeding of waste site traffic because Wilbury Way is not even part of the access route for either of the two metal recycling sites. It was very surprising that little or no account was taken of the possible effect of the traffic which will inevitably be generated by the Highover Farm housing development. The lack of alternative routes for vulnerable road users to pass from east to west of the railway lines using the three dangerous railway bridges (Cambridge Road, Grove Road and Woolgrove Road) did not seem to be acknowledged.

As a result of the shortcomings, the recommendations proposed in mitigation were limited and often amounted to a suggestion to 'consider' the feasibility of an action, rather than doing something that would have an impact. One recommendation was that an additional pedestrian crossing point should be installed north of the rail bridge in Grove Road. Quite apart from the predictable howls of protest from motorists, such a crossing – especially given the proximity of the Bury Mead Road traffic lights - would complicate the already fanciful arrangements to modify the Woolgrove Road / Grove Road crossroads to handle traffic from the new Highover Farm estate and would surely be rejected. The effects of a large increase in metal recycling throughput (and therefore lorry traffic) because of a permit granted to Global Ardour by the Environment Agency was not really considered.

To address issues around early HGV arrivals and idling in Cadwell Lane, speeding and dangerous loads, we suggest that the waste site companies share the HIA with the relevant hauliers. They should introduce an arrivals management system, make it clear that the actions of some drivers are unacceptable, and ensure that any such actions will be met with tough penalties by the waste site operators. We would also like to see 20 mph limits and automatic speed camera enforcement in Grove Road, Fishponds Road, Verulam Road and Nightingale Road, with punitive fines for offending drivers.

The HIA mentioned 'longer term solutions' without really identifying what these might be. Whilst acknowledging that these are difficult and expensive we would suggest re-siting the operations to a less environmentally damaging location. Alternatively, an HGV access route should be created to the sites avoiding residential areas. We also stress that the permit to

increase the throughput from 285,000 to 500,000 tonnes per annum at the Global Ardour site should be revoked.

We sent the following letter to North Herts Council addressing a number of points and asking what NHC are going to do to mitigate the problems...

Hitchin Forum

CARING FOR OUR TOWN

10.07.26

Anthony Roche
Chief Executive
North Herts Council

Dear Mr Roche,

Re HGVs and the Hitchin metal recycling businesses

Hitchin Forum and other organisations and individuals have been concerned for a long time about the number of heavily loaded trucks going to and returning from the two scrapyards off Wallace Way and Cadwell Lane, Hitchin. We estimate the numbers for Wallace Way at around 250 each weekday. Note the recent HIA report says 230 HGV movements in Cadwell Lane in 12 hours, or one every 3 minutes - which will be for both scrapyards.

On enquiring about permitted numbers we have been astonished to learn that in 2022 the permitted throughputs for the Wallace Way site were given a huge increase by the Environment Agency at the request of the operator. This was from 1,250 tonnes per day and 285,000 tonnes per year to 2,000 tonnes per day and 500,000 tonnes per year.

Hitchin Forum's principal concern is the increase in large lorry traffic on the roads through Hitchin which would arise from these large increases in scrap tonnage. In our view this would be intolerable.

The Environment Agency record about this "Variation" (number EPR/NP3503BF/V002) states that North Herts Council Environmental Health and Planning departments were consulted but they record no response from either. Further to that we understand that councillors were not consulted.

We fail to understand why North Herts Council did not respond to this as the scrapyards and the large lorries going to and coming from them have been a source of complaints to the councils by residents for many years.

Fortunately, for the moment, we understand that the present operation of the Wallace Way scrapyards complies with the lower limits of 1,250 tonnes per day and 285,000 tonnes per year. However, we believe that the present or future operators would be at liberty to increase throughput to the higher figures.

Please can you explain why your Council failed completely to comment on these large increases in permitted throughput despite all the representations from your constituents.

Please advise what you are going to do to reduce the permitted tonnages at the very least to the previous lower limits and ultimately to get these HGVs off Hitchin's residential streets.

Yours sincerely

Mike Clarke

Bill Sellids

Co-chairs Hitchin Forum

Dear Mr Clarke and Mr Sellick [sic]

Thank you for your letter of 10 July 2026.

You may be aware that both North Herts Council and Herts County Council have been in regular dialogue with Alistair Strathern MP and Cllr Ian Albert about the metal recycling sites and the two Councils jointly funded the recent Health Impact Assessment work.

During the course of the multi-agency work in relation to the industrial estate (prompted by a concerning number of fires in a short period of time) I became aware that the Environment Agency had emailed both Councils on 16 August 2021 in relation to the variation application. Due to passage of time it has not been possible to establish why North Herts Council did not respond, however I note that your letter references the vehicle movements specifically and the County Council is of course the highways authority locally, as well as the LPA enforcing authority for the site. Following a request from Cllr Albert both Councils have reviewed how they would respond to similar requests in the future, whether for this site or any others and will seek to consult local councillors. We have also asked that the Environment Agency review their processes for such applications.

With regard to your final paragraph, the permitted tonnages are contained within the Environment Agency issued licence and therefore the Council has no ability to reduce the tonnages and linked vehicle movements. I appreciate that this will not be a satisfactory answer for you, however I am able to advise that the District and County Councils and Environment Agency continue to work together to respond to the HIA recommendations and consider wider actions.

Many thanks



Anthony Roche
Pronouns he/him
Chief Executive
01462 474588



www.north-herts.gov.uk



For more information and for links to the relevant documents referred to in this article please visit the website at...

<https://www.hitchinform.org.uk/hgvs-and-the-health-impact-assessment-2026/>

Bill Sellicks – Co-Chair

Churchgate Progress

It may seem at times that little is happening on a regeneration of Churchgate and its surroundings. However, last year North Herts Council commissioned several independent technical studies from outside consultants, examining issues such as commercial viability, car parking, Hitchin Market, public spaces, planning, heritage, deliverability, development risk and long-term town centre sustainability. The findings were reported to Cabinet in June and Full Council in July. This article is drawn directly from those reports.

Car Parking Strategy: the assessment found that Hitchin town centre generally has sufficient parking capacity to meet current and foreseeable demand, with pressure primarily limited to peak Saturday lunchtime periods. Suggested improvements have already begun with digital parking payment adopted.

Market Requirements: consultants were asked to advise on options for delivering a modern market which would be commercially viable of itself as well as supporting the wider town centre. They looked at open-air, covered and indoor market options. The strongest option was found to be a modern indoor market with food hall, with flexible day-to-evening use. There will need to be further work done to assess what options would be most financially viable.

Community Space requirements: existing community space provision within Hitchin was assessed. This did not identify a clear requirement for standalone purpose-built community space within the town centre but this does not preclude, for example, mixed-use or multifunctional spaces being incorporated in future.

Public Realm: a range of design approaches and indicative costs were prepared in terms of future design principles, what would be desirable and budget considerations. This looked at the scale and quality of what could be achieved, rather than prescribing any design requirements.

Planning & Design: this looked at planning from the perspective of NHC as landowner, rather than as planning authority. It considered development constraints such as heritage and viability, protected views, townscape impacts and the relationship with adjoining heritage assets, particularly St Mary's Church. It also covered site capacity and the potential scale and mix of development across the site, including the Portmill Lane car parks.

Developer Brief & Governance: Hitchin is viewed as an attractive regeneration opportunity with strong underlying market interest. However, the work done highlights that the overall viability of any scheme remains finely balanced and further work is needed.

The Council's response: Full Council has agreed a *"single competitive procurement process structured around two distinct phases to appoint the successful bidder as the Council's regeneration partner. Phase 1 will focus on feasibility, viability, deliverability and delivery planning"*. This should *"provide the Council with a clearer understanding of what can realistically be delivered, how it can be delivered and what level of investment, risk and intervention may be required."*

A further decision by Full Council would be needed before proceeding with Phase 2. *"Phase 2 will aim to provide detailed development planning, delivery preparation, planning and consenting activities, development agreement support, implementation planning and other services required to support project delivery."*

The report goes on to discuss the implications of Hertfordshire's local government reorganisation into four new unitary authorities. A Shadow Authority will be established for the first year after elections in May 2027, which would need to consent to any significant transaction such as major land disposals and high-value contracts.

So, a lot of work is yet to be done before a spade is put in the ground.

NOTE: We have not had time to discuss this report (and over 150 pages of supporting evidence from various consultancies employed by the Council) within Hitchin Forum or with the Town Centre Manager or the wider business community prior to newsletter publication, hence the lack of analysis of what has been proposed and agreed by Full Council.

Council documents used in the preparation of this article

The sheer volume of reports and other documents, as well as the complex relationships between them make preparing an overall analysis of the Churchgate progress extremely difficult. In an attempt to help others who wish to form their own opinions, here is a summary of what is available for review. Firstly, here are links to the documents presented at two key council meetings.

Document pack sent in preparation for Cabinet meeting on 16th June 2026

All the consultants' reports are reproduced in the Cabinet papers sent out in preparation for the Council meeting held on 16th June 2026. The relevant pages are pdf file pp 531 - 696 in the link below. One exception to this is the Procurement Diagram, which is referred to but which we have been unable to find.

<https://democracy.north-herts.gov.uk/documents/g3963/Public%20reports%20pack%2016th-Jun-2026%2019.30%20Cabinet.pdf?T=10>

Document pack sent in preparation for Council meeting on 16th July 2026

This document is useful in that it includes links to where the source documents appear within the above large document. Refer to pdf pp 67-78. It also provides some briefing notes on each of the topics to be discussed. Links to the original source documents are listed in the section below.

<https://democracy.north-herts.gov.uk/documents/g3977/Public%20reports%20pack%2016th-Jul-2026%2019.30%20Council.pdf?T=10>

Original Source Documents

Below are links to the original source documents that have been incorporated into the above council document packs.

Development Principles, May 2025

<https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-05/Development%20Principles%20May%202025.pdf>

Churchgate Car Parking Assessment Findings, Markides, November 2025

<https://democracy.north-herts.gov.uk/documents/s31321/2.%20Churchgate%20Car%20Parking%20Assessment%20Markides%20November%202025.pdf>

Community Provision Study, Leonard Design, November 2025

<https://democracy.north-herts.gov.uk/documents/s31322/3.%20Community%20Provision%20Study%20Leonard%20Design%20November%202025.pdf>

Public Realm Assessment, Leonard Design, November 2025

<https://democracy.north-herts.gov.uk/documents/s31323/4.%20Public%20Realm%20Assessment%20Leonard%20Design%20November%202025.pdf>

Churchgate Regeneration Zone Massing Diagrams

This diagram only seems to be available (pdf file p 675) within the Cabinet report of 16th July 2026.

Churchgate Regeneration Zone Soft Market Testing Brochure, March 2026

<https://democracy.north-herts.gov.uk/documents/s31325/6.%20Churchgate%20Regeneration%20Zone%20-%20Soft%20Market%20Testing%20Brochure%20March%202026.pdf>

Churchgate Pre Market Engagement Questionnaire May 2025

<https://democracy.north-herts.gov.uk/documents/s31326/7.%20NHDC01128038%20-%20Churchgate%20Pre%20Market%20Engagement%20Questionnaire%20May%202025.pdf>

Hitchin Prospectus UKREiiF Breakfast Event, May 2026

This appears only to be available at pdf p 693 within the Cabinet committee papers of 16th June 2026.

Town Centre Manager Comment

We sent the above article to our town centre manager, Danny Pearson. He replied with the following comments:

We understand people's frustrations with Churchgate. business owners and residents of our town are all keen to hear what's next for the area (this includes the Market, riverside area, and the car parks). We continue to talk with the council, and Praxis, by giving them our feedback and we look forward to carrying this on with the future shadow council. It is crucial that whatever happens to Churchgate is done the right way and with the best interests of the town, the local businesses and the wonderful community that is already there. I thank Hitchin Forum for being such an important part of this process. Your help and advice have been extremely helpful to myself and the Visit Hitchin team.

Ellie Clarke – member of Hitchin Forum

Luton Airport Expansion

No update this time.

Our Newsletter – we need your views to help improve it.

We try to keep the Hitchin Forum newsletter relevant, informative and occasionally entertaining, but feel it is high time we ask for the views of the readership.

Rather than ask for simple answers to direct questions, we'd like to understand how you view the newsletter and what you think would improve it. There is a link below that will open a new email for you to write your views and ideas. Please don't be put off by all the questions; any input big or small will be welcome.

The Newsletter in its Current Form

The newsletter has been running in a largely unchanged format for quite a few years. Approximately six editions a year are sent out, nowadays mostly by email, but some people prefer a hard copy. Most of the articles tend to fall within several broad categories:

- Updates on local matters – Luton Airport, Churchgate, Hitchin-focused planning applications, transport, solar farms and other major infrastructure developments.
- Historical and technical subjects such as the sewerage systems, slum clearance and the pharmaceutical industry.
- Local places to visit with comprehensive descriptions, historical context and links to further information.
- Environmental matters, such as pieces submitted by people who participate in the many local green initiatives.
- Briefing and reporting on the twice-yearly litterpicks.

The end sections of the newsletter contain a notice board and a brief list of dates and times of meetings and other events that may be of interest in the weeks between newsletters.

How should we reshape the newsletter – if at all?

We would like to get as much feedback and as many ideas as possible to help improve and shape the newsletter for future editions, so **here are some prompts for you to consider:**

- The NL is too long
- It is too short
- It is too frequent
- It is not frequent enough
- The articles are too long and wordy
- Fuller versions of articles – with links to all the references - should be kept on the website.
- How about a quiz, such as 'Spot the Landmark'?

...and a few questions:

- How do you read the newsletter – hardcopy or online via the website?

- Do you follow the links to the references that are used in our research of the article?
- Do you have ideas for new topics?
- Do you have suggestions for any topics that ought to be ‘retired’?

These are just a few suggestions to start the conversation; please feel free to express your own views by email using the link below:

newsletter@hitchinforum.org.uk

Facebook, X and the Hitchin Forum Website

It would also help to understand how you use the website and our other social media outlets. We are wondering if we should cancel our X/Twitter account in favour of Bluesky, for example. What do you think?

Stuart Howarth – Hitchin Forum newsletter editor

Notice Board

Hitchin Forum AGM

Hitchin Forum AGM will be held in the Lucas Room, Hitchin Town Hall on Wednesday 21st October at 7.30 pm. Following the formal business, our (relatively) new Town Centre Manager, Danny Pearson, will be sharing what he and the Visit Hitchin team have been up to this year and some thoughts about the future of the town centre.

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	Sunday 18 th October
Hitchin Forum AGM, Lucas Room, Town Hall	7.30 pm	Wednesday 21 st October