

# HITCHIN FORUM

Caring for our Town

## NEWSLETTER

May - June 2024

No. 180

### Thoughts from the Co-Chair

As I am writing this in the midst of the Somerset Levels – albeit in a converted barn and not in a soggy bog – I am struck by the abundant wildlife and birdsong in this part of the world. In what follows, Annie writes more about the loss of the natural world in our countryside, the loss of insect life and the impact of that. No insects, no pollination, no food seems to be the sequence. Valerie describes some work that the RSPB is doing with the agricultural experiment at Hope Farm, carrying the hope that a change in agricultural methods may offer a sustainable way forward.

It has been a joy to read some of Nic Wilson's pieces in *The Guardian* with nature notes drawn from in and around Hitchin. Diane writes about Nic's work, subtly campaigning for a better world.

Bill brings us back to some of the basics, with curious incidents of dogs in the daytime, including a moan about how 'man's best friend' can be a nuisance to others and our environment if not well managed.

Joined-up thinking is the theme in Brent's description of the life of a puddle. He talks about a problem caused by excavation work carried out next to a bus stop in the town centre that is still not fully rectified years after the problem arose. His point is that councils, utility companies and other contractors do not manage simple issues well, and we put up with it. Not in his article, but in the air, there comes the thought that maybe such issues would be better managed if we had a town council. There is a possibility that district councils will be replaced by unitary authorities – two might take over the work of the county council. And then might we need a town council to manage our local issues? How does that strike you? And try to erase the Letchworth fiasco from your mind!



*Hitchin Forum out and about in Market Place during Eco day.*

Neil finishes off the newsletter with a round-up of his impressive work addressing the town's main current planning issues.

Having said all that, I need to get back to my current preoccupations – will I see those bitterns chasing each other again, and did those grass snakes, after enjoying their laze in the sun, find enough food for the day? And can we imagine having a resurgence of wildlife in our little corner of the country?

**Mike Clarke - Co-Chair**

## 20 MPH Zone Expansion

On 1<sup>st</sup> May the planned enlargement of the 20 mph zone covering parts of the town between Bridge Street, Bancroft and the station was enforced. This is a significant expansion that will undoubtedly improve the safety and liveability of the affected areas. There are, however, a number of striking omissions in the coverage, and a number of signage errors in the implementation. The steering group plans to compile a list of the issues and present it to Herts County Council. If you spot a signage error or have any other comments on the 20 mph zone coverage, please contact [newsletter@hitchinform.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@hitchinform.org.uk) with details, ideally including a photo. Alternatively, you can report it directly to Hertfordshire County Council via this link:

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/highways-roads-and-pavements/report-a-problem/report-a-highway-fault/what-type-of-fault-are-you-reporting.aspx>

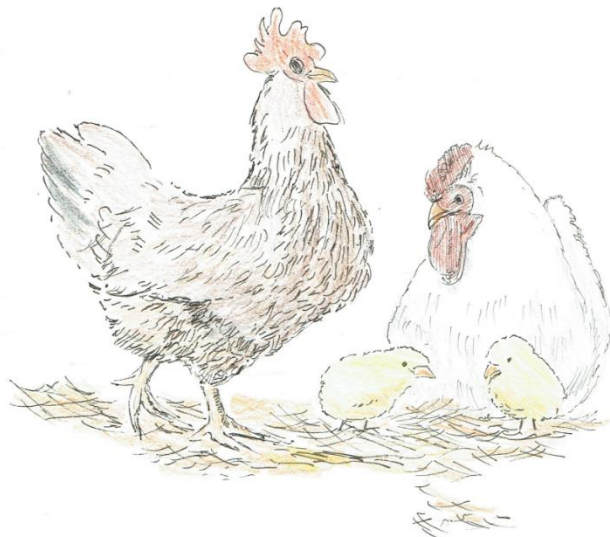
**Stuart Howarth – member of Hitchin Forum Steering Group**

## Our Town, Your Say

*The author of this article, Annie Palmer, is known to many of us as an active member of the Campaign Against Stevenage Expansion - a protest group that was active in the 90s. Her book 'The Powers that be are PULLING THE WOOL OVER OUR EYES' brings together a number of her protest and campaigning pieces, one of which is adapted below.*

## The Threat to Insects and to Ourselves - Part 2: Agriculture

In the UK we are told that one of the main drivers of the catastrophic decline in the number of insects is intensive agriculture, particularly the use of chemicals. People are using them in their gardens as well, so this is obviously seriously compounding the situation. The other main drivers are developments destroying wildlife habitats, and light pollution. Dr Trevor Dines, Plantlife's Botanical Specialist, said that these are the reasons "we see most changes to insect life in south-east England, for that is where we see the greatest spread of towns and cities". We must therefore urgently stop covering our precious countryside with concrete.



ORGANIC EGGS FROM FREE RANGE  
HENS ARE THE BEST

Picture credit - Peter Farmer

With regard to the drastic decline in the number of insects, I can't understand the government's response to the 'ecological apocalypse' scientists have told us we are facing. During the Covid pandemic, the Government was forever saying that "we must and will be guided by the science" and "we will follow the science". Why then aren't they being guided by and following the science when it comes to the catastrophic collapse of nature's ecosystems which will wipe us out? This is a question our children will ask in the near future. I feel it is vital that we ask this question on their behalf right now.

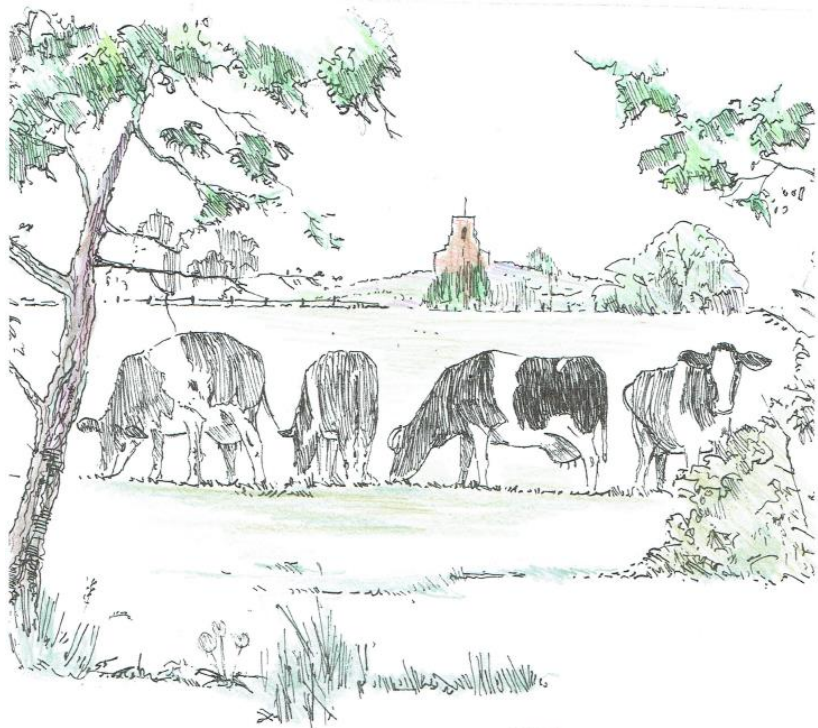
In February 2019 there was an article in The Guardian (Plummeting insect numbers 'threaten collapse of nature') about the alarming decline in the number of insects. The paper's Environment editor Damian Carrington

informed us that: "The world's insects are hurtling down the path to extinction, threatening a 'catastrophic collapse of nature's ecosystems', according to the first global scientific review". Professor Dave Goulson at the University of Sussex in the UK said: "It should be of huge concern to all of us, for insects are at the heart of every food web, they pollinate the large majority of plant species, keep the soil healthy, recycle nutrients, control pests, and much more. Love them or loathe them, we humans cannot survive without them".

One of the biggest impacts of insect loss is on the many birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish that eat insects. Francisco Sanchez-Bayo (University of Sydney, Australia), a writer of the review, said: "If this food source is taken away, all these animals starve to death". The prognosis for us is pretty grim as well.

An analysis, published in the journal *Biological Conservation*, says intensive agriculture is the main driver of the declines, particularly the heavy use of pesticides (insecticides, fungicides, molluscicides and herbicides). Urbanisation and climate change are also significant factors.

With regard to intensive agriculture, the really good news is that the damage is reversible and this can happen in a remarkably short period of time. The review noted that organic farms had more insects. If we stop using synthetic fertilisers and pesticides in our fields (and, importantly, in our gardens as well), reinstate hedgerows, create wildflower meadows along with small areas of woodland, carry out crop rotation and apply mixed farming methods (which includes livestock) then we can reverse the damage.



COWS NEED GRASS  
AND GRASS NEEDS COWS .

*Picture credit - Peter Farmer*

In Britain, there is an absolute need to stop development on greenfield sites. Intensive agriculture is reversible; covering the countryside with concrete is not.

On a personal level, I am eating a lot less meat as I am only buying organic grass-fed beef reared in the UK (affordability is the issue here). 90% of the time I buy organic milk, eggs from up the road and seasonal fruit and vegetables grown in this country. I am doing my best and I feel that I can't ask more of myself than that.

When it comes to helping our insects, gardening in an insect friendly way without the use of synthetic fertilisers and pesticides is definitely a step in the right direction - we just need to keep on "stepping" but ideally not at dawdling pace! And, for nature's sake, not on plastic grass.

**Annie Palmer – local resident and campaigner**

## An experiment on our doorstep - Farming for Wildlife at RSPB Hope Farm

Just over 40 minutes' drive away from Hitchin via the A505 you will encounter the RSPB's Hope Farm. For years the RSPB had been trying to persuade farmers to farm in a more wildlife-friendly way but to little avail. Therefore a decision was made by Mark Avery, their Conservation Director at the time, to set an example by becoming farmers themselves to demonstrate and research how you could farm in a way, without being organic, to benefit and encourage wildlife whilst still being a profitable and successful food-producing business.



With the above in mind, in the year 2000 the RSPB with the tremendous help of its supporters bought a typical, family-sized, ordinary arable farm in Cambridgeshire that had challenging, heavy clay soils. The vision was to develop new, wildlife-friendly farming techniques that could be shared with the wider farming community. Their aspiration was to halt the ongoing decline of red-listed and endangered species which depended on traditional farming practices to survive. Consequently, they aptly renamed their newly acquired asset as "Hope Farm".

In order to judge if their new methods would make a difference, the RSPB had to spend two years surveying what wildlife was already there and it was found that once-common birds such as skylarks, linnets and yellowhammers, though present, were low in numbers. Due to the British Trust for Ornithology's data gathered in the 1990s, highlighting the cataclysmic decline in farmland birds, these were a priority but, at the same time, the RSPB hoped that the changes they proposed to introduce would benefit other species. Thus their monitoring programme also included butterflies, bumblebees, moths, hares and other groups.

The most optimistic of the RSPB's personnel believed that by experimenting with new farming methods, such as planting wildflower margins, providing seed mixes, and nurturing hedgerows to benefit wildlife, they might be able to double farmland bird populations at Hope Farm - see photos below.



However, nobody anticipated that they would quadruple skylark and linnet numbers, more than double yellowhammer numbers and bring back grey partridges, lapwings, yellow wagtails and corn buntings. Surprisingly, what has been more amazing than the increase in birds has been the increase in butterflies, which have increased over four-fold and continue to do so, 29 species having been recorded at one point. Furthermore, monitoring has highlighted seven species of bumblebees, including the nationally scarce ruderal bumblebee, and over 350 species of moths have been identified using light traps. The latter included the threatened white-spotted pinion and square-spotted clay moth. In addition, the Huntingdon Fungus Group completed a one-year study and identified a magnificent 491 fungal species including the *Eutypa crustata*, recorded for the first time in Britain.

Fortunately, I have been able to witness how agriculture and wildlife are working together at Hope Farm on two occasions. The first occasion was on an Open Farm Sunday two years ago (see collage and photos below) which is being repeated this year on June 6<sup>th</sup> at 10 am to 4 pm.



Should you wish to take part you can register on [their website](#)<sup>1</sup> though by now it may have already sold out.



The second occasion was on a two-hour guided walk on a Saturday in April this year to experience firsthand the RSPB's nature-friendly farming initiatives and how these are being shared with the farming community. At the start of the walk, over coffee, we were given a fifteen-minute introduction by Hope Farm's Assistant Manager, Sophie Arnold. We then set off on what was a cold and windy day to walk around the farm, stopping at various points of interest en route so Sophie could point out the research methods, farming practices and some of the trials that are being undertaken. For example, Agroforestry where trees and shrubs are deliberately integrated into farming systems to provide shade and shelter or capture carbon or produce products such as fruit (see adjacent photo). To date over 1,000 trees have been planted – 13 varieties of apple tree and three varieties of cobnut with the aim of investigating how this system affects the farm's biodiversity.

We were also made aware of how hedges of differing heights, widths and species can attract different birds. For instance, the threatened turtle dove is very particular about its habitat, requiring areas of scrub or dense hedgerow with thorny species such as Bramble, Hawthorn or Blackthorn at least three metres tall and four metres thick. On request Sophie took us on a long walk to an area where the farm is trying to create such a habitat to entice a turtle dove heard calling nearby (see adjacent photo).



In addition, we were shown areas set aside for winter birdseed mixes to ensure a plentiful supply of food is available for them during the winter months, a total of five hectares being cultivated and sown for this purpose.



Also, if you look closely at the adjacent information board, you will notice a piece on the incredibly rare corn buttercup, as well as some general information on the farm and its cornfield flowers. As corn buttercups have lots of benefits for invertebrates, the farm is carrying out trials in the hope of getting them re-established there.



Finally, a word was said about the importance of fields of oilseed rape (which are becoming less popular amongst farmers) for migrant birds, such as the white throat, and pollinating insects - see adjacent information board.

It was then time to make our way back to the warmth of the barn and eat our packed lunch whilst reflecting on the morning's experience.

Hopefully, this piece will have inspired you to visit Hope Farm on June 6<sup>th</sup>, their Open Farm Sunday or on another such occasion, or even arrange a group visit there for an organisation you might belong to. I'm sure you will find it an enlightening experience. Furthermore, Sophie Arnold is always willing to come and speak to groups about Hope Farm and its farming methods designed to benefit nature.

1. Hope Farm open day:

[https://events.rspb.org.uk/hopefarm?utm\\_source=Hope Farm Openday May24&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=Hope Farm Openday&utm\\_content=3&utm\\_campaign=Hope Farm Openday](https://events.rspb.org.uk/hopefarm?utm_source=Hope Farm Openday May24&utm_medium=email&utm_term=Hope Farm Openday&utm_content=3&utm_campaign=Hope Farm Openday)

**Valerie Schicker - member of Hitchin Forum Steering Group**

Note - The information gleaned in writing the above was taken from the following two websites and my two visits to the farm. All photos were taken by the author on the occasion of her visits.

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/helping-nature/what-we-do/influence-government-and-business/farming/hope-farm>

<https://community.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/farming/b/farming-blog/posts/celebrating-20-years-of-hope-farm-1570594517>

You may also be interested in their X (formerly Twitter) feed: @RSPBHopeFarm and their 2024 series of technical webinars:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ky-1H\\_qXA4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ky-1H_qXA4)

## Our Town, Your Say

*The author of this article writes for the Herts Memories website and shares here her appreciation of local wildlife writer Nic Wilson.*

### Campaigning matters – and I’ve found a new voice to say why.

For a woman to write about nature, *a room of one’s own*<sup>1</sup> is not enough; she needs downs, woodlands, hedgerows and chalk streams. Hertfordshire, for all its wounds and compromises has enough of these to keep a writer like Nic Wilson very busy.

Nic has lived in Hitchin for over twenty years. After raising a family, writing features for gardening magazines and building her [award-nominated website](#)<sup>2</sup>, her wellspring of ideas has bubbled to the surface. I think her writing provides a bridge between the Forum’s campaigning discourse and the imagination, and that’s why I’m recommending her for you to read.

The Forum is committed to *caring for our town* [see [hitchinforum.org.uk](http://hitchinforum.org.uk) logo]; but stand at any number of portals to Hitchin, look over your shoulder and you will pivot between urban and rural. Think - West Hill/Oughtonhead, Kingswood Avenue/Ninesprings, Priory Way/Priory Park. We need both domains to make complete the experience of living here.

Being guardians of our skies, our green spaces and our rivers means immersing ourselves in data, in planning criteria – and all other modes of the official lexicon. We can add to that the ubiquitous language of ‘the nature cure’: how to find wellbeing and resilience in the natural world. It is not surprising we mostly talk and write about nature in these prescribed ways. In fact, we strive to use the ‘right’ language in order to be taken seriously, to win the argument.

Is this language a flexible enough tool? Does it speak for us when we want to be compelling about why we bother, why we campaign? Burdened by the sheer effort of not giving up, perhaps we need some breathing space to connect and enjoy?

This is where reading Nic’s work comes in. She is my guide to the wild. Her fearless, eclectic style helps me focus my senses on the worth of my encounters in nature. The freshness and power of her writing has refocused my thinking at a time when that giant nail file paring away at my hopes for the Green Belt has left me jaded; when the fliers and notices have become hedgerow litter.

When I read Nic’s *Country Diary* articles in *The Guardian* I am happy to let her imagination lift the burden of advocacy. She shows me how to look to like, and liking, look again.

Since July 2020 she’s been quietly creating her vision of Hertfordshire for a growing body of readers. If you believe in soft power, this is it. *The Guardian*’s UK monthly print readership is 3.1 million. In addition, Nic’s description of the squirrel stand off on [Norton Common - black v grey](#)<sup>3</sup> has the potential to reach 81 million unique [monthly visitors globally](#)<sup>4</sup>.

Pasqueflowers on Therfield Heath, Deadly Nightshade by the Ash Brook, the Sparrowhawk preying a Kingfisher at Ninesprings, Jack Snipe and Otter spraint by the Purwell, the (almost impossible) Hoopoe at Hinxworth and the rare Small Blue (*Cupido Minimus*) in the chalk pit at Hexton: Nic has found them all and



*Nic Wilson. Picture credit – Steve Granger*

then found the language to make us wish we had been there. In the process she has made their value and importance a joy and their protection an imperative.

*The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*<sup>5</sup>. Is this why campaigning is so exhausting? Let's make room for a new voice on the platform.

1. *A Room of Ones Own. Essay, Virginia Woolf 1928*
2. Nic Wilson's website:  
<https://nicwilson.net/>
3. Nic Wilson's profile on The Guardian website. See entry for May 2021:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/may/14/country-diary-your-eyes-do-not-deceive-you-this-is-a-black-squirrel>
4. *The Guardian* website monthly reach:  
<https://wan-iffra.org/2023/11/how-the-guardian-continues-to-drive-print-revenues-through-subscriptions/>
5. *Sister Outsider. Essay, Audre Lorde 1979*

Find more information and links to Nic's writing via the links below:

<https://www.hertsmemories.org.uk/content/herts-history/towns-and-villages/hitchin/hertfordshires-emerging-writers-2024-nic-wilson-from-hitchin>

<https://www.gardenersworld.com/author/nicwilson/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/profile/nic-wilson>

***Diane Maybank – member of Hitchin Forum***

## **Not everybody agrees that a dog is 'man's best friend'.**

In a crowded island, where most people live in towns and cities, we start to accept codes of behaviour, even laws, that previous generations might have found hard to understand or unnecessary. Compulsory seat-belt wearing and drink-driving limits were strongly contested when first imposed, but now have public support. We all, unthinkingly, flout some rules and laws, railing against the latter particularly when freshly imposed. Again, motoring provides several examples. Signs saying 'Keep left unless overtaking' on motorways are ignored by many, in turn making the instruction harder to obey for others. We conveniently fail to see signs and arrows in car parks (the 'no left turn' sign just after entering the Waitrose car park in Hitchin, for instance). We speed when we think we can get away with it. We invent justifications for our non-compliance. For drivers, these are often of the form 'I've been driving for years – I know what I'm doing'.

This casual avoidance of inconvenient rules extends to how we manage our most popular pets. I am not talking about the extremely rare, headline-grabbing recent dog attacks which had such tragic consequences. I am afraid that a sizable proportion of dog owners demonstrate a lack of imagination or empathy. Some owners, blinded by their devotion to their pets, are unable to understand that their confidence in their dog's good nature is not universally shared. In extreme cases, it is expected that those who are not dog owners should somehow be able to make an instant assessment of an animal's potential threat, and respond accordingly. Dog owners can fail to appreciate that their pet, however friendly, can pose a threat to other animals, including



other dogs. The management of dog waste is a particular problem. The following examples are all incidents I have witnessed recently and are far from isolated.

A black Labrador, off the lead, runs towards a woman who is clearly afraid of the animal. The dog barks and jumps up, leaving muddy paw marks on her clothes. The owner's response (presumably in an attempt to reassure) is to say "He won't hurt you, he just wants to play." In fact, on one occasion, an owner accused the unfortunate victim of encouraging the dog's unwanted attentions by showing her fear of it. Neither owner offered an apology.

Many nature reserves display notices asking owners to keep their dogs on leads to avoid disturbance to ground nesting birds during certain months. Farmers frequently erect signs warning dog walkers of the danger that farm animals, particularly sheep, may have to be put down as a result of harassment by an uncontrolled dog. In my experience, those notices are routinely ignored.

A common sight is the owner who, whilst walking their dog, is actually focused on their phone. The dog is off the lead, nowhere to be seen. Whilst the owner may be carrying plastic bags to pick-up after their dog, they have no idea of where it might have defecated. I have seen this happen in fields of wheat or other food crops. In some cases, farmers display notices requesting dog walkers to keep their dogs on a lead, pointing out the obvious potential for crops to be contaminated by dog poo. The notices have little effect.

I would like to know why some dog owners go to the trouble of bagging their dog's poo, only to either leave the bag on the ground or hanging on a branch. I have heard it suggested that the idea is that the walker returns the same way and collects the bags as they do so. Why? The bags can't be that heavy. If you are going to do that, you are signalling to others that leaving the bags (and other litter) [lying around is acceptable](#)<sup>1</sup>. Not only that, but you have to remember where you have left them. There seem to be a lot of people with very short memories out there. The worst case I can recall is one bag which had been thrown over the river on Oughtonhead Common and was caught on the branch of a tree. I am sure that bag was there for a good ten years.



The [Kennel Club's Canine Code](#)<sup>2</sup> provides full details on how to be a responsible dog owner, addressing all of the issues above. I know owners who are just as frustrated and mystified as I am by the behaviour of others. Wouldn't it be good if all dog owners could take a few minutes to think about others, check their responsibilities and behave accordingly? More widely, we all have an impact on others and the environment. We have our blind spots, and tend to be oblivious of our impact when it is not immediately obvious, particularly when our behaviour conforms with prevailing group norms or has become an ingrained habit. Whilst it's easy to identify things we don't like about others' behaviour, we should be prepared to ask ourselves how our actions are perceived, and be willing to change.

1. Beacons of Litter: A social experiment to understand how the presence of certain litter items influences rates of littering. Keep Britain Tidy, November 2016:  
[https://www.keepbritaintidy.org/sites/default/files/KBT\\_CFSI\\_Beacons\\_of\\_Litter\\_2017.PDF](https://www.keepbritaintidy.org/sites/default/files/KBT_CFSI_Beacons_of_Litter_2017.PDF)
2. The Kennel Club Canine Code:  
<https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/about-us/about-the-kennel-club/the-kennel-club-codes/the-kennel-club-canine-code/#:~:text=Take%20care%20of%20your%20dog's%20health%20and%20well%2Dbeing&text=Under%20Section%209%20of%20the,the%20animal%20fit%20and%20healthy>

**Bill Sellicks – Co-chair**

## Our Town, Your Say

*The author of this article is a retired building surveyor who has lived in Hitchin since 1965. He is one of the founder members of Hitchin Festival and the Hitchin Town Centre Initiative, and has been active in the building preservation movement both locally and nationally.*

### The Story of a Puddle

This isn't really so much the story of a puddle, more a comment on the lack of joined up thinking in local and national government. The puddle was caused by the sinking of the reinstatement work carried out after the electricity main was extended to serve the redevelopment of the Post Office site. The developer paid for the reinstatement but it soon sank, forming the puddle and, worse still, tripping hazards. And this being at the point of Hitchin's highest footfall. It should have been reinstated at the expense of the utility company.

The years passed, photographs were taken and shared with councillors in case they had not noticed it, until, about six years later, it was repaired a few weeks ago. The pavement adjoining had been redone in red tarmacadam, but it stopped short of the offending area.

Goodness knows how many people fell over during the intervening years, but I met one of them when carrying out almshouse visits this year. The lady had been quite badly injured and had required a stay in hospital. She has recovered but life must have been difficult for her.



It occurred to me that the cost of her treatment was probably greater than the cost of reinstating the pavement. Multiply this by the number of others with similar experiences and the cost to the state is enormous, but the Highways Authority would say that they did not have the necessary budget to carry out the work. (I would contest this, thinking that it is more a problem of efficiently prioritising and tackling their work.) In a sensible world we would look at the total cost of the problem rather than individual budgets.

There has been an interesting initiative in Blackpool ([BBC article<sup>1</sup>](#)). In what must have been a moment of enlightenment, they decided to repair the roads rather than leaving them as they were and paying compensation for damage or falls caused by the potholes. They were paying out on average over £1.5 million a year to settle claims, by last year this had dropped to £719 – and just think of the associated savings in the NHS, Care Services etc. They have the additional benefit of becoming loved by their electorate!

In a previous article in [Newsletter 170<sup>2</sup>](#) on the “Greening Up” Report and the possibility of having trees in Hermitage Road, I set out the environmental and health benefits which would accrue from this and similar projects. Its research showed that urban greenery has the capacity to boost our natural and social ecosystems. As with our individual wellbeing, research is demonstrating how green spaces and urban trees can improve our collective health, providing the physical setting for healthier communities with stronger social bonds. Trees and neighbourhood greenery have been shown normally to improve interpersonal relations and support

more tightknit communities, whilst being associated with slower cars, less crime and higher local business revenues. Our proposal seemed timely with the paving programmed to be carried out, but fell on deaf ears.

As with the puddle, the benefits would exceed the cost of the work. I suggested that perhaps there could be some change in the way that local government is funded so that they receive payment for these cost and health benefits, rather like the way that farmers are paid for ecological and environmental improvements. This would yield massive results. I live in hope.

1. Blackpool Council slashes compensation bill for pothole falls - BBC News:  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-lancashire-67892850>
2. Hitchin Forum Newsletter 170:  
<https://www.hitchinforum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Hitchin-Forum-NL170-Sept-Oct-2022.pdf>

*Brent Smith – member of Hitchin Forum*

## Planning – a summary of the key current issues under scrutiny

**Housing Development Area HT3**, involving 43 dwellings on “Land to the South of Oughtonhead Lane” was deferred to a later Planning Committee meeting “while late information from the applicant was being considered”, believed to be regarding pedestrian access to the site. We have not heard any more since 21<sup>st</sup> March, and nothing appears to have been done on site so far. Note however that the controversial vehicular crossing over Oughtonhead Lane to Lower Innings has already been approved, as it was presented and accepted last year as a separate submission from the housing development.

**Sites HT5 and 6**, located north and south of the bridleway which runs from the top of Grays Lane to Headlands, have both got planning permission, but as of this last weekend, nothing has happened on either site.

**Site HT1**, being the Highover development for 700 houses, again with planning approval, was the subject of a well-attended exhibition by the developer in the Town Hall on 27<sup>th</sup> March. Much of the concern from existing neighbours related to traffic arrangements. We wrote afterwards to reaffirm our original comments.

The proposed **Sainsbury’s convenience store** in the car park of the Anchor PH was strongly contested by us and others, including on traffic grounds, but was surprisingly passed unanimously by the Planning Committee on 21<sup>st</sup> March.

We criticised a revised scheme involving four two-storey blocks located within the space between **Garrison Court**, Woodcote House and Baliol Chambers as being “overbearing and claustrophobic”.

Alterations to **The Exchange** keep coming up in various guises, this time involving minor changes to the windows. We said that these were an improvement on previous proposals, but reiterated our previous objections to cramped basement flats, lack of parking and possible damage to facing brickwork.

**1 Pirton Road** is another project which kept on reappearing in various shapes. We reiterated our concerns over traffic from the 9 flats, including conflict with main road traffic and cars from other nearby developments HT5 and 6. It appears that the scheme has now been conditionally approved, following acceptance by Herts Highways.

**9-10 High Street** was occupied by Woolworths, and latterly Poundland and M&Co. The proposal by Powerhaus is to demolish the existing building and rebuild from the High Street back to Paynes Park, with 46 apartments on the upper levels, an underground car park accessed from Paynes Park, and two smaller shop units on the High Street. We responded concerning the high density of housing, the lack of ‘affordable’ dwellings, and problems with accessing the car park from the busy Paynes Park.

**25 High Street (opposite Boots)** dates from 1937, and this application involves replacing the upper floor windows with uPVC frames and double glazing.

A proposal for a **four-bedroom house** in the Bella Vita car park was notable for the complete lack of any plans or drawings, and we responded by saying that we couldn't comment upon it without these.

The redevelopment of **Westons Motors' site** seems to be nearing completion. This is a 'brownfield' site which we approved in principle and commented on in detail.

### **Scrap lorries and containers and other large lorries**

On 13<sup>th</sup> May, residents of Verulam Road and other streets in Hitchin must have woken to wonder what was wrong with their hearing – no large HGVs full of scrap passing by every five minutes. Meanwhile their counterparts in Old Hale Way and other roads were surprised to find a procession of large lorries suddenly appearing there. The answer lay in Grove Road, where heavy machinery was busy rebuilding the road, which appears to have given way due to years of pounding by HGVs. The lorries were diverted down Bury Mead Road, by removal of bollards and a series of diversion signs. However, this didn't always work out, with large lorries going down Bearton Road and Periwinkle Lane, including meeting up on the 90-degree bend near the foot of Periwinkle!

*Neil Dodds – member of Hitchin Forum Steering Group*

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## **Have Your Say on North Herts Council (NHC) Matters**

If you wish to make your feelings known on any NHC-related matters, you are encouraged to visit the 'Have Your Say' page at [www.north-herts.gov.uk/haveyoursay](http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/haveyoursay). Via this page you can get involved in current consultations and also join the citizens' panel. Connections to social media can be made by clicking on the icons at the bottom of the page.

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## **Dates for your Diary**

<b>Hitchin Councillor Surgeries.</b> Hitchin Market Place.	10.30 am to 12.00 noon	First Saturday of every month
<b>Public meeting</b> on all things transport, with Jeff Clayton, Strategy & Programme Manager, Highways Implementation, Growth & Environment, Hertfordshire County Council.		Postponed as a result of rules imposed by the general election process
<b>Annual General Meeting</b> to be followed by the postponed talk from Elizabeth Hamilton of CPRE: 'A Recent History of Hertfordshire – and how CPRE continues to campaign to protect the countryside' Venue: Friends Meeting House	7.30 pm for a 7.45 pm start	Wednesday 6 <sup>th</sup> November
<b>Autumn litter pick</b>	10.00 am to 12 noon	Sunday 20 <sup>th</sup> October

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