

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE URBAN DESIGN ASSESSMENT

HITCHIN



**Final Report
September 2007**

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INTRODUCTION

The Hitchin Urban Design Assessment final report is structured into four sections.

1. INTRODUCTION

The introductory section sets the context for the Urban Design Guidelines and the Urban Design Assessment by providing background information for some of the assessment criteria, an overview of the settlement's geographic and socioeconomic conditions, a review of the current policy context unique to Hitchin and an historic overview of the town.

2. URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

The Strategy Plan and Settlement Principles lays out broad principles in both planimetric and text form which characterise the five Urban Design zones and sets out principles for circulation, views and legibility.

The Urban Design zones section defines the areas associated with each Urban Design zone. The Hitchin Urban Design zones have been created on the basis of existing characteristics, reflecting the morphology, density and typologies of each area, *and* an understanding of how these areas should be viewed in light of any potential development or regeneration of the zone. The guidelines demonstrate the ideals for that zone in terms of such issues as building heights, setbacks, typology, morphology and densities.

Guidelines based on the assessment criteria have been created for each zone, followed by case studies for infill sites and larger sites.

3. URBAN DESIGN ASSESSMENT

The Urban Design Assessment provides the baseline evidence and analysis which has shaped the strategy plan, settlement principles and urban design guidelines. The assessment follows the criteria described in the district-wide report. Please note that the maps contained within this report are not to scale. The Key Issues, Safeguards and Opportunities outlines the issues that emerged from the baseline evidence and analysis with potential steps to be taken to address them.

4. CONSULTATION WORKSHOP

The Consultation Workshop summary encapsulates the results of the Hitchin stakeholder workshop. Many of the stakeholder comments have been used as evidence in the urban design assessment.

URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES and CASE STUDIES

The Urban Design Guidelines have been created on the basis of each Urban Design zone. The guidelines have been developed following the Urban Design Assessment criteria described in the district-wide report, although circulation, views and legibility have been addressed under the settlement-wide principles.

Urban Design Criteria

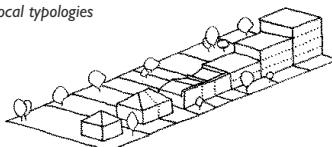
The following examples provide a summary of the urban design criteria used:

Building types

Building types considered for Hitchin include:

- Bungalows
- Terraced housing
- Semi-detached housing
- Detached housing
- Two-storey block of flats
- Three-storey block of flats
- Four-storey block of flats

Local typologies



Building heights

Building types considered for Hitchin includes:

- One-storey
- Two-storey
- Three-storey
- Four-storey

Density

Density is based on an amalgamation of a number of different elements including building typology, building height, spacing between buildings, setbacks and garden size:

- Low density generally refers to one and two storey detached houses, with large spaces between buildings, large setbacks and gardens;
- Medium density generally refers to two storey semi-detached houses with medium spaces between buildings and medium sized setbacks and gardens; and
- High density generally refers to two storey terraced houses and two, three and four storey blocks of flats, with small setbacks and small or communal gardens.

Building lines

Building lines will be considered for each Urban Design zone generally in terms of:

- Large setback (6+ metres, depending on the building height)
- Medium setback (3 -6 metres)
- Minimal setback (0 - 3 metres)

Building orientation

Building orientation impacts urban design in terms of:

- Building orientation toward street front
- No particular building orientation

Pattern of open spaces

As well as the pattern of public open spaces within the urban area, gardens have also been considered in terms of:

- Divided front gardens
- Shared front gardens
- Divided rear gardens (back-to-back with rear gardens)

The type of garden reflects on such concerns as the appearance of the streetscape, the privacy of the dwellings, quality of the wildlife habitat, the type of development, and the size of the development site.

Parking

Parking options can be classified as:

- On-street parking
- On-site communal parking
- On-site individual parking

Decisions on the parking type relates to type of streets within the Urban Design zone (primary or secondary through streets, cul-de-sacs, or dead-end streets)

Case Studies

The case studies apply the various classifications of the guidelines to create a range of recommended possibilities for each Urban Design zone. Depending on the zone, case studies may suggest applying the following density conditions relative to the surrounding character:

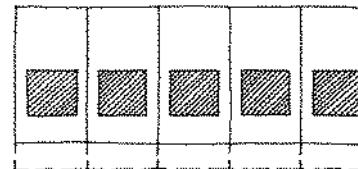
- typical density - which works with the existing building typologies, building heights and setbacks;
- enhanced density - which considers a moderate increase in density looking at different typologies, building heights and setbacks; and
- increased density - which considers a significant increase in density looking at different typologies, building heights and setbacks. Increased density is generally only suggested where larger sites (discussed below) are available.

The case study drawings which follow each zone's guidelines are illustrative only, particularly as it regards car parking or amenity space.

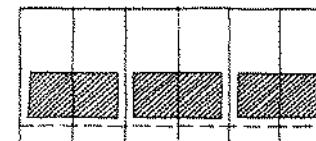
The case studies dedicated to each zone are divided into two categories, infill and block sites. A block site is considered to be an site area greater than 0.35 hectares, with dimensions of no less than (approximately) 50 metres by 70 metres. Block sites, due to their size, have greater latitude to introduce new densities and characteristics into an urban design zone. Examples are shown to the right.

The determination of minimum block size has drawn advice from the Urban Design Compendium, produced by Llewelyn-Davies for English Partnerships and The Housing Corporation in 2000.

Infill samples



Detached housing, medium setback = approx. 30 dph
(Assumes 5m setback, 11.5m rear garden, 13m x 25m plot)
Detached housing, large setback = approx. 25 dph
(Assumes 10m setback, 11.5m rear garden, 13m x 30m plot)



Semi-detached housing, medium setback = 40 dph
(Assumes 3.5m setback, 11.5m rear garden, 9.5m x 25m plot)
Semi-detached housing, no setback = 50 dph
(Assumes no setback, 11.5m rear garden, 9.5m x 21.5m plot)

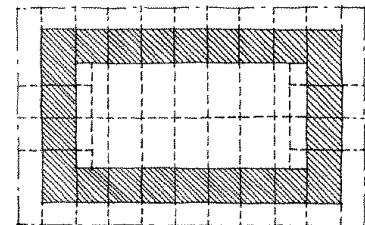


Two-storey terrace housing, medium setback = 60 dph
(Assumes 4m setback, 11.5m rear garden, 7m x 25m plot)
Two-storey terrace housing, no setback = 70 dph
(Assumes no setback, 11.5m rear garden, 7m x 25m plot)
3/4-storey terraces with flats, medium setback = 100 dph
(Assumes 4m setback, 11.5m rear garden, 7m x 25m plot)

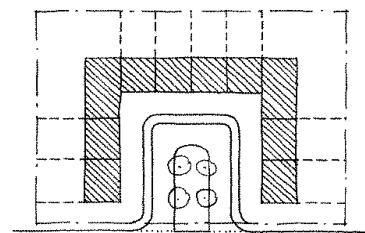
Block samples

The block samples were designed on the basis of the minimum block size of 50x70 metres (0.35 ha).

Minimum perimeter block



Close development



HITCHIN - TODAY

Physical Location

Hitchin is situated in a gently undulating region of North Hertfordshire, lying on the northern face of the Chilterns and is intersected by the River Hiz. The town's neighbour, Letchworth, is separated from Hitchin by a gap of only a mile, while Luton lies only eight miles away to the south-east, and Stevenage only five miles south-west.

Transport Connections

There are four main roads leading out of Hitchin. Bedford Road (A600) leads north to Bedford, and, to the south and south-west, Stevenage Road (A602) takes traffic to Stevenage and the A1 (M). Running south-east/north-west the A505 links Hitchin with Luton, Letchworth, Royston and Cambridge. The nearest access to the A1 (M), running north/south, is via Stevenage Road, the A602, running southwards.

Hitchin Station sits in the north-east of the town and provides direct services to London (30 minutes, 4 per hour), Cambridge and Peterborough, local services to towns such as Stevenage, Letchworth, Royston, and two routes serving the suburbs of north London.

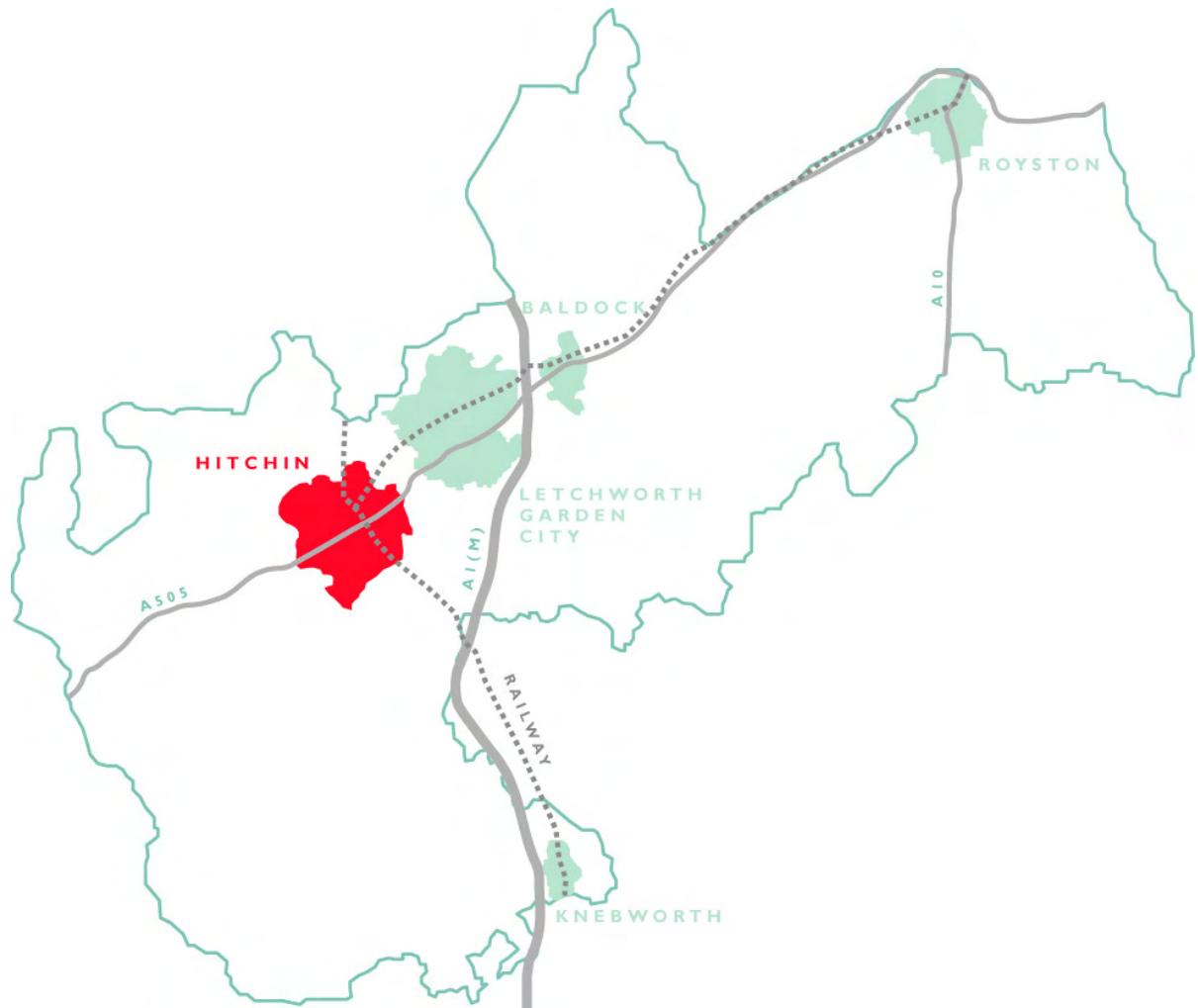
Bus services run regularly every half hour to Letchworth and Bedford, as well as every hour to smaller destinations such as Baldock.

Population

According to the national census, in 2001 Hitchin had a population of 30,851; the second largest town in the North Hertfordshire district after Letchworth.

Social composition

Over half of the population fall within the 25 – 50 age and Hitchin's population structure closely resembles the district average, slightly below average among the age group 5 -15, and above the average among the 16 - 42 and 51 - 59 age groups.



LOCAL POLICY CONTEXT

Planning Policy Context

Hitchin Policy Review

INTRODUCTION:

Hitchin is a traditional market town with medieval origins. The medieval street pattern, plots and historic fabric have been retained, and as a consequence much of the town centre has been designated as a Conservation Area, along with The Avenue, Highbury Road and Chiltern Road. However, there are pressures for new development to support the town's shopping and service roles, which need to be properly handled if the town's unique character is to be maintained.

LOCAL POLICY:

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL LOCAL PLAN:

Green Belt:

The Green Belt around Hitchin is drawn with reference to:

- Maintaining the separate identity of the town
- Preventing the spread of the built-up area into areas of good quality agricultural land and areas of landscape importance

Landscape and open space patterns in towns:

The key elements in Hitchin are:

- The river/valley network with high ground in between tributaries of River Oughton
- The railway line which has influenced the location and character of employment and housing development
- The character of residential areas, with:
 - Older housing in the town centre
 - Older housing with substantial landscaped areas to the south
 - Large contemporary housing estates to the north
- Major open spaces associated with river valleys and recreation facilities
- Important views are limited to:
 - Towards the town from Wilbury Hill, Letchworth, Rosehill, Great Wymondley, Stevenage Road, Parkway (Priory Park), and the A505 (west)
 - From the town along the open spaces associated with the rivers, and towards Windmill Hill, Hollow Lane, and St Michael's Road

Housing proposals:

Housing in the town ranges from medieval, Georgian and Victorian properties in the town centre, to significant areas of 19th and early 20th century terraces, and more modern estates on the outskirts of the town.

Employment:

There are limited opportunities for increasing the level of commercial land use in the town.

Leisure uses:

Areas like Walsworth Common, Oughtonhead Common, and Priory Park serve to enhance local environmental standards, though the overall quantity of public open space is below the space standards recommended by the National Playing Fields Association. Open space is unevenly distributed around the town, leaving areas like Westmill with a particular deficit of open space.

Shopping:

The former Nightingale Road Goods Yard has been allocated for development as a non-food retail warehouse park.

The growth of shopping floorspace has been restricted by the requirements of the historic environment, and by strategic policies that have sought to promote sub-regional centres at Stevenage and Luton. As a consequence, the Council will resist proposals for changes of use in the shopping core.

Proposals for additional shopping provision will be expected to add to the range and type of existing shops, and integrate well with the existing town centre in terms of scale and form.

Transport:

Existing employment areas are currently responsible for adversely affecting the environment of adjoining roads and areas. The Council will therefore refuse development proposals that might result in significant increases in traffic until all highways works have been completed.

Hitchin Town Centre:

Hitchin is in possession of an attractive, historic, and commercially successful town centre, which has received national recognition. Though the Council are keen to attract new developments that will bolster the town centre, special attention will be paid to the ability of any new development to benefit the historic environment.

HITCHIN TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY (September 2004):

The Strategy provides a context for promoting changes and improvements in Hitchin town centre.

The strategy will be complemented by an Action Plan, and will seek to assist in the achievement of the strategic priorities for 2004-2007 of:

- Creating opportunity for all by promoting sustainable economic development
- Promoting sustainable development of the district to ensure the delivery of adequate affordable housing, environmental protection, and the conservation of historic settlements
- Promoting first class leisure and cultural facilities, contributing to healthy living for all citizens

- Encouraging responsible citizenship and creating safe communities with less crime and less fear of crime

Hitchin is a historic market town with a strong and vibrant town centre, and offers a healthy mix of retail provision, business premises, and leisure activities. The town retains a strong local identity, and features historic streets and buildings, independent specialist retail units, a vibrant market, and attractive public spaces.

The vision for Hitchin town centre is to 'maintain the quality of the built environment based on its intrinsic historic character, and to develop an attractive, safe, accessible, vibrant and lively town centre for the local community and visitors to shop, work, and live in'.

The key aims to be met in achieving this vision are:

- Ensuring the long term economic sustainability and viability of the town centre
- Promoting a balanced and diverse mix of uses within the town centre
- Generating employment opportunities and housing for the benefit of the local community
- Enhancing the environment of the town centre by promoting local distinctiveness, conserving the historic character of the town, achieving good quality design and preserving the public realm
- Actively promoting the market and ensuring its operational success
- Providing a safe and secure environment
- Encouraging the highest quality, complementary regeneration
- Promoting a town centre accessible to all by encouraging a choice of transport modes
- Improving access for pedestrians and other non-car users to and within the town centre
- Providing new and replacement community facilities
- Implementing a strategy for long term management and maintenance of the town centre as a whole, for the benefit of shoppers, businesses, and residents
- Improving tourism and inward investment to the town
- Encouraging greater community involvement in the life of the town centre, and
- Making the most efficient use of land, buildings, energy, water, and waste

Shopping:

Hitchin Market:

The market operates on three days per week, and is successfully bucking national trends to prosper, and is currently a significant local retail asset.

The Council has consulted with market traders and customers to identify areas for improvement, with suggestions including:

- Improved access for all
- More flexible capacity
- Improved circulation around stalls for both customers

- The market should feature a good variety of permanent, enclosed, and demountable stalls, allowing for flexibility and generating vibrancy
- The market should remain an open market, and be designed to contribute to and respect the town's historic character
- Appropriate parking provision must be made for traders' vehicles

The Council will work together with the Hitchin Market Traders' Association and other organisations to actively promote the market, and to ensure its continued successful operation. An Action Plan for the market will be formulated.

Commercial and leisure uses:

Hitchin town centre currently possesses a good variety of land uses, with a particular diversity of uses on upper floors, where C3 Residential and B1 Office uses predominate. There are also numerous A3 Food & Drink and D1 Leisure land uses in evidence.

The Council is aware of significant demand for new A3 uses in the town centre, and encourages these developments where they benefit the town centre in terms of generating activity. However, it will resist proposals when they are likely to result in an over-saturation of the market, and will look to preserve a good mix of land uses.

Residential:

The town centre has witnessed a significant quantity of new residential development in the past ten years. The Council regards this as a positive development, which adds to the vibrancy and security of the town centre. In accordance with Government policy, the Council will support proposals for additional residential development achieved through the conversion or redevelopment of commercial properties, subject to preserving the historic character, including historic uses.

The Council is looking to increase the quantity of affordable housing in the town centre, and the variety in the tenure and unit size of new residential dwellings.

Community facilities:

Consultation undertaken with the local community has suggested that there is demand for a new community cultural centre within the town centre. The Council will work towards obtaining facilities of this kind, as well as improving existing community buildings and facilities, in partnership with the local residential and business communities.

Accessibility:

The success and attractiveness of a town centre is closely linked to the degree of access it affords residents and visitors alike. Hitchin currently suffers from traffic growth, which is a consequence of its position on the primary route network. It is possible that the Baldock Bypass could have an impact on existing traffic conditions.

A key accessibility-related issue is the separation of the

LOCAL POLICY CONTEXT

Lairage car park, the museum, the library, and the Waitrose supermarket from the rest of the town centre. This is the result of the one-way system, and the Council has commissioned a transportation study to identify possible improvements.

The town centre's accessibility to motorists is compromised by the distribution and legibility of off-street parking provision. At present, visitors use the short-stay St Mary's and Portmill car parks to a disproportionate degree, as they are the most easily accessible, and the most legible. The Council will look to improve the accessibility and signage directing visitors to other town centre car parks to create a more balanced distribution of car park use.

The Council produced a Car Parking Strategy in 2004, which recommended that developers should be obliged to replace any car parking provision lost due to development, that opportunities should be provided for new short-term parking, and that steps should be taken to increase use of Lairage and Woodside car parks.

Public transport:

The Council is investigating the potential for bus priority measures, which would operate alongside qualitative enhancements to the location and infrastructure of bus stops.

Pedestrians:

There is currently some conflict between pedestrians and other forms of traffic, as pedestrians are obliged to use the main highway network. The main pedestrian flows are along High Street, Bancroft, and Market Place.

The Council has identified opportunities to improve pedestrian links within the town centre by:

- Strengthening the link between the Lairage car park, the library, and museum to the retail core as part of the Paynes Park redevelopment
- Opening, enhancing, and creating a new walkway along the River Hiz between Hermitage Road and Bridge Street, and between Hermitage Road and Bancroft Recreation Ground
- Strengthening pedestrian links to Portmill Lane from Bancroft by improving the existing walkway and providing an additional link from Hermitage Road as part of the Post Office redevelopment
- Improving the surfacing and signage on the pedestrian link along Walsworth Road to Woodside car park and the rail station

Future new developments should strengthen and improve pedestrian links within and to the town centre. The Council will also work with Hertfordshire County Council to assess the potential for extending pedestrian priority measures within the town centre.

Cycling:

Hitchin town centre does not possess any designated

cycle routes, meaning cyclists currently utilise the same main highway network, which can create tensions with other road users.

There is therefore a recognised need to:

- Improve the safety of cycle routes to and through the town centre
- Avoid unnecessary conflict with pedestrians
- Make provision for and maintenance of cycle parking and equipment storage facilities within the town centre
- Encourage local businesses to provide facilities for employees cycling to work

The Council will continue to work with Hertfordshire County Council to identify ways in which cycle access could be further improved, such as cycle lanes, cycle crossings, cycle signage, and parking provision. All new developments will be expected to reflect the County Council Cycling Strategy.

Community safety:

Hitchin town centre is currently a safe and secure environment with low crime levels, and the Council is keen that this situation is maintained. To ensure this, the balance and location of evening economy uses will be regularly reviewed to ensure it remains appropriate, and helps to maintain and promote a safe and secure environment. In addition, the Council will look to extend CCTV coverage and improve street lighting.

Built environment:

Hitchin town centre has largely retained its historic medieval street pattern, and the majority of the town centre has been designated as a conservation area as a consequence. A Conservation Area Character Statement produced in 1998 identified positive characteristics to be retained, and suggests improvements including:

- enhancing the appearance of the Park Street Triangle, which is an important gateway into the town
- Re-establishing the original character of Queen Street, which has been lost through contemporary development
- Reviewing the role of St Mary's Square, which currently does not contribute to the town's character
- Improving the poor townscape at Portmill Lane
- Improving the poor townscape created by unattractive and out-of-date stalls at the Market
- Bridge Street could be improved
- The environment of the River Hiz is poorly maintained from Bridge Street to Hermitage Road, and around Sainsbury's
- There is unsympathetic modern infill in Bancroft and Paynes Park

New development in the town centre must respect the existing historic environment and reinforce built character in terms of scale and the proportions of sur-

rounding buildings. Guidance produced by CABE shows that it is possible to bring forward contemporary designs that work within an established local character.

Design Briefs will be prepared for Moss's Corner, Queen Street frontage including the gateways at the Park Street Triangle and at Walsworth Road/Windmill Hill, and the gateways at Parkway and Old Park Road/Bedford Road.

Public spaces:

The Council will seek to protect and enhance or improve public spaces in the town centre, including core spaces like Market Place and Churchyard. The Council will also seek to create new spaces within new development proposals within the town centre.

The River Hiz is a feature of the town that should be enhanced, and there is the opportunity to improve the river as a focal point in the town, which can be used as an amenity and as an attractive pedestrian walkway linking areas of the town.

Opportunities for opening up the river exist:

- Between Hermitage Road and Bridge Street
- Between Hermitage Road and Bancroft Recreation Ground, with the proposed development at the Ransom site. The riverside walk would be attractively landscaped, illuminated at night, and clearly signposted from Hermitage and Whinbush Roads.

Moss's Corner has the highest pedestrian footfall in the town centre core area, though the character of existing hard landscaping detracts from the area's appearance. A high quality landscape scheme, with reduced street furniture clutter, reduced changes in level, and improved pedestrian access in general, would be beneficial.

Consideration will be given to improving the environment at Paynes Park, and in particular improving the visual environment of the street frontage, and improving the pedestrian linkage from Lairage car park to the High Street and Market Place. The Council is working towards preparing a planning brief for Paynes Park.

The street frontage at Queens Street needs to be visually enhanced, and consideration will be given to:

- Working with Hertfordshire County Council to recover space from motor traffic
- Providing a better setting for St Mary's Church and other historic buildings
- Using hard and soft landscaping where appropriate
- Ensuring new developments and refurbishments enhance the character of the streetscene

Gateways:

Gateways have been identified at the Park Street Triangle, Windmill Hill/Walsworth Road, The Park Way, and Bedford Road/Old Park Road.

Promotion and marketing:

Hitchin is a multi-functional place, acting as a market place for retailing and businesses, a focus for a variety of social and economic uses, and as a cultural and entertainment venue. As a consequence of this combination of roles, and due to Hitchin's status as an historic market town that is part of the heritage of Hertfordshire and lowland England, the town needs to be promoted and marketed on a regional and national basis.

Good quality signage and street furniture, which are sympathetic in design to the character of the town, can enhance the identity of the town. To enforce this the Council has agreed a Hitchin Town Centre Design and Colour Scheme for street furniture. Any future enhancements should make positive contribution to the character of the town, and work within the agreed design and colour theme.

HITCHIN - HISTORY

The settlement of Hitchin has been dated to pre-Roman times, the site offering a strategic crossing point of the River Hiz (much wider during this period than it is today, now that it has been canalised). Under the Romans the settlement grew on a north/south route on the higher side of the river, but it wasn't until the Saxon occupation that the settlement acquired a permanent identity from the tribe who finally settled there, the Hicce. Hitchin's survival as a town was finally assured when Hitchin was chosen as the base by King Offa for the victories which brought him the throne of Mercia, leading to the foundation of a Palace and a Benedictine Monastery.

Hitchin received borough status during the 12th century, trade taking place at markets held adjacent to the church and along the main route northwards. A Carmelite Monastery, established in the 13th century, played an important role in Hitchin's social and political life over the next 200 years, providing education, alms and a brewery, and a Gilbertine order grew on the site of the Biggin in the 15th century. Both were dissolved in 1534 and the sites sold. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were also very prosperous periods for the town which benefited from the wool, grain and malt trades, allowing improvements and decoration to the Church, and seeing a rise in population. The market, originally consisting of temporary street stalls set out on a wide street, evolved into a collection of permanent stalls which were gradually built up to provide permanent shops and workshops with accommodation above. The resulting street plan remained unchanged until the nineteenth century, despite further population growth.

The opening of the railway line in 1850 was accompanied by rapid population growth, the town's population doubling between 1811 and 1861. Housing was built speculatively to the north of the town centre, and running along towards the station - terraces to be bought by those working at the extensive sidings around the north of the station, and villas for the growing middle classes. The railway facilitated Hitchin's trade in corn, wool and lime, and provided jobs handling coal travelling down from the north to London.

Only 45 minutes from London by train, Hitchin expanded again in the inter-war and post-war period, with housing initially built around the north, west and east of the new Victorian core and station, with later housing filling in the gaps to encircle the historic centre.



Hitchin, as recorded for a tithe map, 1844.

URBAN DESIGN ZONES

Urban Design zones

For the purpose of this study, Hitchin was divided into seven Urban Design zones, grouping developments by period and use. The Employment Area, Open Land and Local Amenities are studied as units, while the main four zones are treated in more depth and analysed issue by issue.

Town Centre zone

This zone covers the historic heart of Hitchin, bordered to the west by Old Park Road and Park Way, and to the east by Park Street, Queen Street and Walsworth Road. The zone is comprised of the close-knit town houses from the 16th to 20th centuries, structured around Market Square and surrounding streets, ending to the end of Bancroft.

Historic High Density zone

This zone refers to the Victorian and Edwardian development just to the north of Fishpond and Nightingale Road, and an area north of Walsworth Road.

Pre-war/Inter-war Semi-detached

The majority of houses within this zone were built between the turn of the 20th century and the Second World War. They are mostly semi-detached and have a common style; usually of brick with period detailing around windows and doors.

Low Density Mixed Residential zone

This zone contains mixed groups of houses, with building ages ranging from the late nineteenth century to the present. Some areas of the zone contain clusters of buildings of a similar age, such as the Edwardian villas along The Avenue, or The Chilterns, where there is a majority of inter-war development.

Post-war Suburban zone

Includes low quality, single design 1960s and 1970s estates, and high-end developments from the late 1980s and 1990s as well as small pockets of contemporary development occupying sites which have become available in recent years.

Employment Area

Located to the east of and in between the two branches of the railway to the north of the settlement, this incorporates light industry, business units and large warehouses.

Open Space

Small patches of publicly accessible land throughout Hitchin, with large sections to the north of the settlement, and east of Melbourn Road.

Local Amenities

Small areas of land dispersed throughout Hitchin accommodating community facilities such as schools, leisure centres and health facilities.



Hitchin Urban Design zones.

STRATEGY PLAN and SETTLEMENT PRINCIPLES

Urban Design Zones

The Town Centre zone is a strong local retail centre, offering shoppers a high quality and wide range of both independent and multiple retailers. The Town Centre zone provides visitors with a pleasant historic environment in which to shop and linger. The Market Square is a particularly important and attractive asset, creating a beautiful, enclosed public space at the heart of the town. Hitchin's historic architecture underpins the town centre's success, although there are several large and prominent modern buildings which detract from the environment, such as the Churchgate shopping centre. Design quality should be a priority during the redevelopment process, and designs should respond sympathetically to the existing historic fabric. Mixed land uses should be encouraged in new developments, with retail at ground floor level and residential above to maximise street level activity and encourage sustainable town centre living.

A riverside walk along the River Hiz between Bridge Street and Hermitage Road would represent a major new asset by establishing a new green connection linking the town centre with the market area. A green space on the eastern bank opposite the church would complement existing greenery around the church and create a pleasing contrast to the hard landscaping of Market Square, and would provide a strong public realm adjacent to the retail core. The presence of permanent stalls at the market site should be questioned - when the market is not in progress, the site brings a feeling of neglect to the heart of the town.

Heavy traffic isolates the Paynes Park/Old Park Road triangle, including some important local amenities such as the library, the museum and a multi-storey car park detracts from pedestrian and cycle connectivity between the town centre and the outlying zones, which is a strong feature throughout the rest of the settlement.

B The Historic High Density zone provides quality low-rise high-density terrace housing with strong links to the Town Centre. The uniformity of scale, street morphology, building heights and Victorian architectural styles gives the Historic High Density a distinct character within the settlement which should be protected and respected in any new development.

C The Pre-war/Interwar Semi-detached zone should provide quality low-rise, low to medium density housing which accentuates the existing street morphology and topography, and acts as a transition between the town's periphery and centre. The zone contains areas of distinct character where building types, density and architectural style are uniform. Generous green landscaping lends these areas a semi-rural feel and an open neighbourhood character which should be protected.

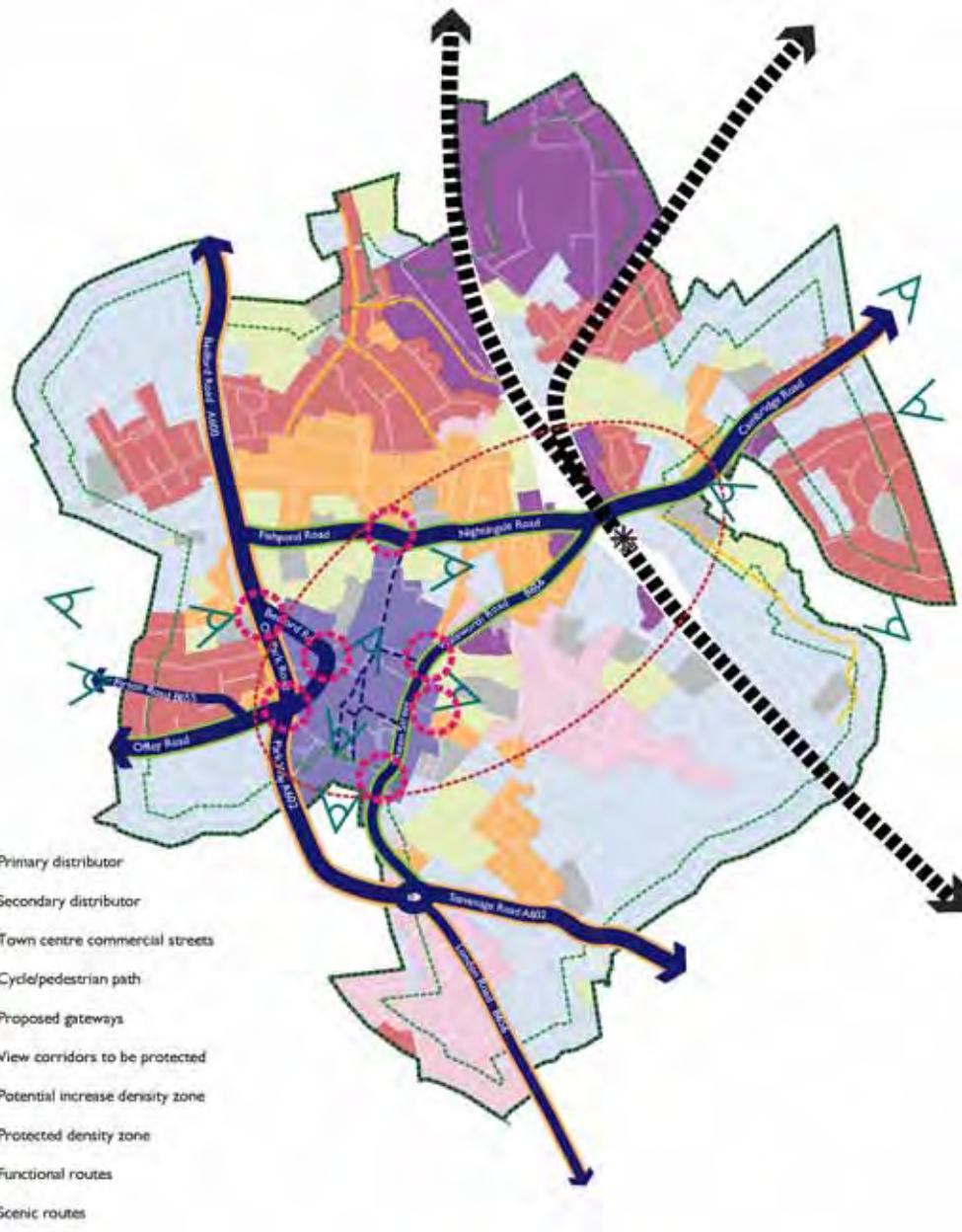
D The Low Density Mixed Residential zone is charac-

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE URBAN DESIGN ASSESSMENT SEPTEMBER 2007

Strategy Plan

Town Centre	Primary distributor
Historic High Density	Secondary distributor
Inter/Pre War semis	--- Town centre commercial streets
Low Density Mixed Residential	— Cycle/pedestrian path
Post-war Suburban	○ Proposed gateways
Employment Zone	△ View corridors to be protected
Open Land	○ Potential increase density zone
Local Amenities	□ Protected density zone
Railway Station	— Functional routes
	— Scenic routes

Settlement-wide principles for Hitchin.



STRATEGY PLAN and SETTLEMENT PRINCIPLES

terised by mixed aged neighbourhoods. Some areas of the zone, such as The Chilterns or The Avenue, which lie within the Conservation Area, have a high enough concentration of a particular type or style of building to create a distinct neighbourhood character, and in these areas new buildings should aim to reinforce this character.

E The Post-war Suburban zone contains a range of developments, from streets of low density bungalows to flats and higher density two storey cul-de-sacs. Densities could be increased on streets that are not distinctively uniform with low-rise developments that do not compromise the area's roofscape. The use of cul-de-sacs should be discouraged wherever possible as these create permeability, legibility, orientation and security challenges.

F The Employment Area supports the diversity of the local economy, and is largely contained within two strong edges, creating a boundary between it and surrounding residential areas. Accessibility is an issue, producing congestion in the surrounding residential areas. Opportunities for direct access routes into the zone should be investigated.

G Potential increased density zones: the Town Centre and the Historic High Density zone are the most sustainable locations for higher densities, offering residents direct pedestrian and cycle access to Hitchin's excellent retail offer or to the most sustainable transport connection in and out of the town. The station and the Town Centre should act as poles for higher density, offering residents proximity to the most sustainable transport hub and encouraging town centre living. The area lying in between the two should also be seen as an opportunity area for increase densities due to its proximity to the town centre and station, and as a means of enhancing cohesion between the two.

Circulation

G The primary distributors, the A505 and the A600, carry traffic through the town but create barriers to pedestrians within the town centre. Pedestrian and cycle crossing points should be reviewed to address this issue. These roads should accommodate cycle lanes to encourage cycle movement around the settlement in the face of heavy traffic.

H The secondary distributor roads should facilitate through traffic, ensuring that two-way traffic is prioritised over on-street parking, with street design to ensure calmed traffic, and efforts made to include cycling routes.

I The main commercial streets within the town centre should be considered as an activity zone which prioritises the High Street uses, such as generous pavements and pedestrian crossings, over through traffic.

Recommendations from the recent car parking strategy should be implemented to encourage the use of designated parking spaces on the fringe of the town centre, rather than on-street parking in the immediate centre.

J The railway is a significant barrier in Hitchin, dividing the eastern side of the settlement from the centre, including a college. It is particularly problematic to pedestrians and cyclists, and causes congestion around the access to the station. Opportunities should be sought to create new crossings across the railway line. The location of the university creates pedestrian flow issues between the university and the town centre. A link between the station main entrance and the pedestrian bridge adjacent to William Ransom Junior School would improve the situation.

K Cycling is popular among commuters, but could be further promoted as a means of transport within the settlement in general.

L Pedestrian links are an important feature of Hitchin, providing excellent links from the town centre into the countryside. These should be protected and enhanced, particularly regarding dark or narrow alleyways which are perceived to be a security risk.

Views

M Views across Hitchin are an important feature of the settlement and thought should be given to any new developments which might impact them. The Town Centre zone is particularly sensitive in this respect, as the topography provides views across it from Windmill Hill. Building heights should be protected as they reflect Hitchin's topography within the built environment. The perimeter of the settlement should be seen as an area of protected densities in order to create a low-density boundary between the settlement and the surrounding countryside. Where possible, new developments should draw on the topography as a means of creating views and vistas into the town.

N Views into the town centre zone from a number of gateway points should be enhanced to improve visitor and residents' perception of the town, with particular emphasis on the gateways highlighted by the Town Centre Strategy.

Legibility

O Hitchin's Urban Design zones are configured in broadly radial terms, with the highest densities at the Town Centre and the lowest densities at the town's periphery. This pattern of densities, combined with the architectural styles associated the zones, makes Hitchin a very legible town. This characteristic should be recognised and continued in Hitchin's future development.

P Gateways should be enhanced at several points around the town centre to improve Hitchin's image and

legibility. The main access routes into the town should be given careful design attention.

Q Functional Routes: The functional routes into Hitchin would run north-south along Bedford Road and Parkway to London Road and Stevenage Road. A short section of functional route where residents benefit from service roads.

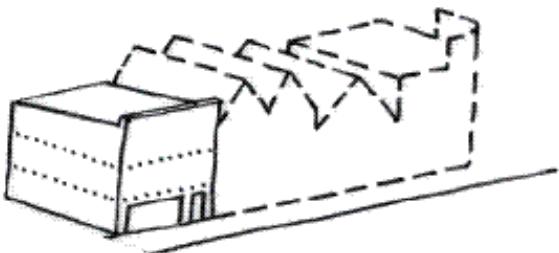
R Scenic Routes: These routes should encourage connectivity between different areas within the town, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists. These would cover an orbital section circling the Town Centre, including Fishpond Road, Nightingale Road, Verulam Road, Highbury Road and St John's Road. Scenic radial routes to and from the centre would include Walsworth Road and the lower end of Cambridge Road as well as Wymondley Road connecting with the Eastern side of the railway via St Michaels Road.

URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES: TOWN CENTRE ZONE

	Criteria		Page Reference	Photo Reference
Making places	Building types	The town centre contains a large majority of town houses built on narrow plots as continuous frontages. These should dictate the scale and typology of new build in the zone. Where several small plots are combined to accommodate larger buildings, detailing should be used to replicate original plot sizes and building scales. Opportunities should be sought to redevelop buildings which do not fit in with the majority typology.	24	
	Materials / architectural styles	The historic architecture in the town centre zone is one of Hitchin's most important features. New designs should complement rather than compete with historic styles, using similar materials. Flat roofs are inappropriate to the historic roofscape in Hitchin's town centre and should be avoided. There should be some scope for innovation, allowing the townscape to evolve into the future.	26	3-7
	Listed buildings/ Conservation Area	The Conservation Area covers the Town Centre zone entirely, safeguarding Hitchin's medieval layouts and plots, several Grade I and other listed buildings, and a number of buildings of local interest. This is therefore a sensitive area for new architecture, and an area where public realm quality is more noticeable. Public realm improvements should be maintained and cover the whole of the Conservation Area. They should be sensitively designed and use high quality materials.	29-30	
	Building heights and massing	Variations in heights between two and three storeys in the immediate town centre creates interest in continuous frontages, as is the case in Market Square. Yet heights across the zone as a whole are generally consistent at three storeys. This is a very important feature of the historic town, creating strong building lines, bringing order to a variety of styles, and creating pleasing views from several vantage points within the settlement. This consistency should not be broken.	32	9-12
	Density	High densities are suitable within the town centre, and could accommodate a mix of uses, with retail, commercial and leisure uses at ground floor level and residential above ground.		15-16
	Topography	Buildings should fit in with the existing townscape which brings out Hitchin's undulating topography. This gives buildings on the higher areas around Windmill Hill and the north eastern fringe of Hitchin excellent views over the town and beyond into the countryside.	34	18-19
Continuity and enclosure	Town Morphology	Hitchin's morphology reveals a strong urban structure, with a large degree of pedestrian permeability in both the town centre zone and outlying zones. These pedestrian links should be protected and enhanced to preserve connectivity between the Town Centre zone and the rest of the settlement. Open space is a key link between the town centre and outer zones and should be kept as permeable as possible.	35-36	
	Building lines, set-backs and gaps	The continuous frontages which line many of the streets in the town centre create very strong building lines. New buildings should maintain continuous frontages.	37	21 - 24
	Building orientation	Frontages should be directed towards the street, and blank walls modified where the opportunity arises, unless part of the intrinsic character of a historic building.	39	26 - 27
	Pavements	The use of high quality pavements in the town centre matches the quality of the architecture in the zone. Pavement quality should be maintained.	41	29 -30
	Open space	The Town Centre zone contains important public spaces which should be protected and preserved. Market Square is an important hard-landscaped area in the town, and efforts should be made to expand the soft landscaping found to the east of St Mary's Church around the banks of the River Hiz. The River should be seen as a major opportunity site for a riverside walk connection Hermitage road to the north with Bridge Street to the south.	43,45	32 - 35
Making connections	Land use	The town centre contains A1, A3 and A4 uses, including independent retailers and multiples. The balance of these uses and types of retail is an important part of Hitchin's character as a town and its strength as a district comparison shopping location. This balance should be maintained. Residential uses may be accommodated above ground, with ground floor uses reserved for retail.	48	
	Circulation, demand and linkages	Pedestrian circulation around the town centre is easy thanks to the diverse linkages which permeate the historic layout, and pedestrian connections between the Town Centre zone and outlying zones are strong, with the exception of Park Way. Existing links should be protected and enhanced, and the barrier caused by traffic along Parkway addressed. Connections to the multi-storey car park are a major challenge in Hitchin. Connectivity to the station from the east should be improved.	50	37 - 40
	Parking	Car parks in the immediate centre are prioritised over those on the fringe of the Town Centre zone, causing over-crowding. A number of measures have been suggested to tackle this, and have been incorporated into the town centre strategy for Hitchin. Parking along the River Hiz should be rationalised to make room for new public space along the banks of the river.	52	42 - 45
Quality of the public realm	Streetscape elements	Streetscape elements in the town centre match the quality of the built environment, and should be maintained. There is a major opportunity to create a new riverside walk with a distinct landscape right at the heart of the settlement.	54	47 - 51
	Security	The town centre strategy has identified anti-social behaviour associated with the night-time economy as a problem in Hitchin, and has suggested a number of measures to tackle the issue. Alleyways should be well-lit to reduce security risks across the settlement. Light fittings should be attractive and of a high quality in order to enhance the character of the town centre.	56	53

CASE STUDIES: TOWN CENTRE ZONE - INFILL SITES

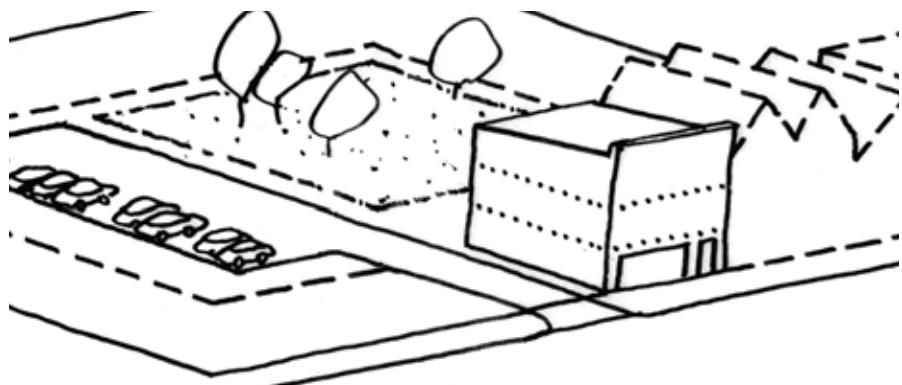
This page considers the typical typology of the Town Centre Zone.



CASE STUDY TCI: Typical density

This case study shows a three-storey infill building with no setback. This approach could apply to any area within the town centre. It is assumed that car parking would occur on-street or in nearby existing car parks.

CASE STUDIES: TOWN CENTRE ZONE - BLOCK SITES



CASE STUDY TCI: Typical density

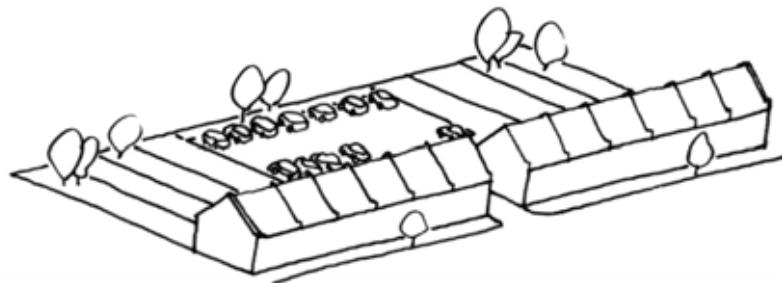
This case study shows a three-storey building frontage. New blocks should match typical dimensions, including the demarcation of plots within blocks. Parking should be kept off-site, to the rear, as indicated in this drawing.

URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES: HISTORIC HIGH DENSITY ZONE

	Criteria	Guidelines	Page Reference	Photo Reference
Making places	Building types	The main typologies in this zone are terraces, semi-detached houses and detached Edwardian villas, plus later detached and terraced infill. New-build typologies should follow the prevailing typologies in each street, particularly in relation to the redevelopment of infill sites.	24	
	Materials / architectural styles	Despite later infill, the consistency of Victorian and Edwardian materials and style across the zone gives it a distinctive character. The use of similar materials such as red and yellow brick should be encouraged in this zone, along with the high level of detailing characteristic of these properties.	26-27	3-7
	Listed buildings/ Conservation Area	N/A		
	Building heights and massing	The majority of houses in this zone are two storey; future development should follow this, particularly in relation to the redevelopment of later infill sites where bungalows have been built. Longer block sites could potentially rise to three storeys.	31	9-12
	Density	The Historic High Density zone is of a medium to high density, particularly in terraced areas. The zone as a whole would be suited to low rise high densities, and is a sustainable location for them due to its proximity to the station and the town centre.		15-16
	Topography	The Historic High Density zone in Hitchin is primarily flat.	33	18-19
Continuity and enclosure	Morphology	The Historic High Density zone grew up around in between the town centre and the railway. Its proximity to the two gives it potential to be a hub of sustainable transport connections.	35-36	
	Building lines, setbacks and gaps	High densities in this zone contribute to strong building lines. The short setback characteristic of Victorian properties should remain standard across the zone, with front gardens open to view. The small and regular gaps between semi-detached and detached buildings in this zone should be the model for future development here.	37	21 - 24
	Building orientation	Buildings should front the street to increase natural surveillance of the zone.	39	26 - 27
	Pavements	Pavements in the Historic High Density zone are often narrow, and roads can become congested with on-street parking. This issue should be addressed with parking, traffic flow and sustainable transport strategies.	41	29 - 30
	Open Space	Access to open spaces such as Butts Close should be protected and enhanced. Low front garden boundaries should be encouraged to increase the amount of greenery on the street.	43,45	32 - 35
Making connections	Land Use	This zone is mostly residential	49	
	Circulation, demand and linkages	This zone is often used by through traffic due to its easily navigable streets and proximity to the town centre. Strategies should be investigated to reduce non-residential traffic flow through the zone.	50	37 - 40
	Parking	Parking within the Historic High Density Zone is predominantly on-street, causing congestion to some streets. This problem should be tackled as part of a wider parking strategy within Hitchin, and communal parking areas could be one solution. New developments should strive for on-site parking, although the conversion of front gardens to parking areas should be discouraged as this detracts from the public realm and reduces the absorption of storm water runoff.	52	42 - 45
Quality of the public realm	Streetscape elements	Public streetscape elements are not a prominent feature of this zone, but front gardens are usually open to view, built with low walls or fences. This form of front garden enhances the otherwise hard landscaping of the zone considerably, and should be encouraged in new infill.	54	47 - 51
	Security	Security within this zone is enhanced by natural surveillance from high densities. Streets should be well maintained as a high quality public realm can discourage anti-social behaviour. A lighting strategy should ensure that the zone is well lit as a whole, targeting narrow alleyways and potential security risk locations.	56	53

CASE STUDIES: HISTORIC HIGH DENSITY ZONE - INFILL SITES

This case study considers typical typologies for the Historic High Density Zone.

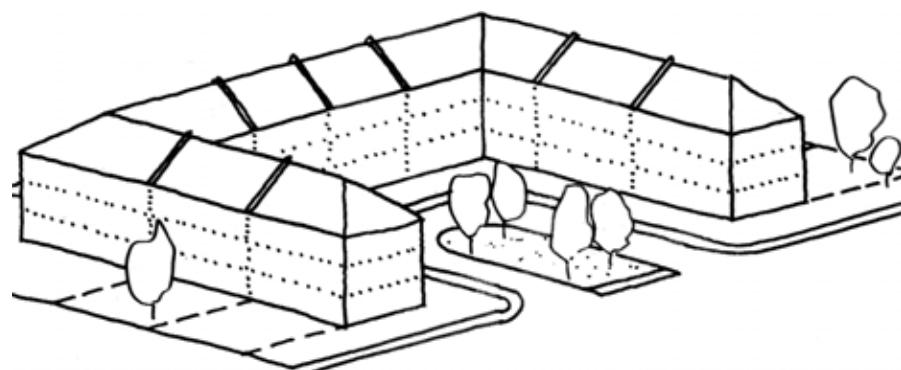


CASE STUDY HHDI: Typical density

This case study shows terraced housing characteristic of the victorian streets such as Morton Street. Infill should repeat typical typologies, and amenity parking areas could address parking congestion in the zone.

CASE STUDIES: HISTORIC HIGH DENSITY ZONE - BLOCK SITES

This case study considers enhanced possibilities for block site development within or adjacent to the Historic High Density Zone.



CASE STUDY HHD2: Enhanced density

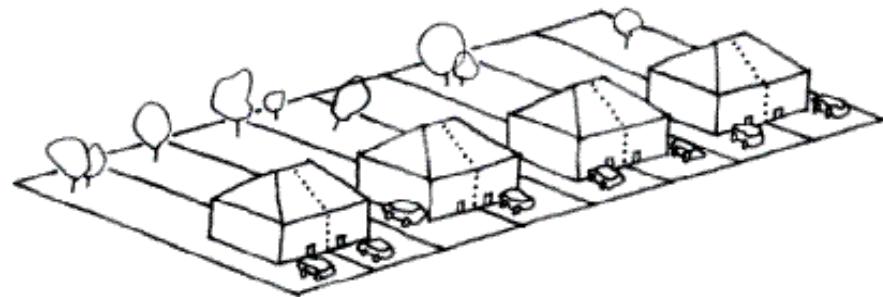
This case study shows three-storey terrace perimeter blocks where car parking would occur off-street within the block. These would be suitable in this zone as residents would benefit from proximity to the station, and from being within walking distance of the town centre.

URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES: INTER-WAR/PRE-WAR SEMI-DETACHED ZONE

	Criteria	Guidelines	Page Reference	Photo Reference
Making places	Building types	The main typology in this zone is semi-detached houses, plus later detached infill in some parts of the zone. In streets where there is little infill, semi-detached should remain the typology. Where the character of the street has been changed by large numbers of infill developments, a range of typologies may be suitable, so long as they respect the predominant scale of the neighbourhood. Larger block sites could emphasise the higher densities of terrace housing.	24	
	Materials / architectural styles	In neighbourhoods of little or no infill, common styles, use of materials and consistent period detailing create strong character. These neighbourhoods should be protected and respected in new designs when considering choice of materials as well as level and style of detailing. Areas where this character has been weakened by much later infill may be approached less conservatively.	27	3-7
	Listed buildings/ Conservation Area	N/A		
	Building heights and massing	The majority of houses in this zone are two storey; future development should follow this.	31	9-12
	Density	Lower and consistent densities are essential to the spacious character of some parts of this zone and should be respected where infill has not changed the original character of the neighbourhood. Higher densities maybe suitable in other parts of the zone.		15-16
	Topography	The Pre-war/Inter-war zone is spread out over Hitchin and some parts of it such as those to the west of the Town Centre Zone enjoy views over the settlement. Even building heights should be encouraged to bring out Hitchin's topography in the streetscape, and to maximise the potential it offers in terms of views.	33	18-19
Continuity and enclosure	Morphology	The Pre-war/Inter-war zone is structured in a ring around the northern half of the settlement important thoroughfare for pedestrians between the inner and outer zones. Pedestrian routes in the zone should be protected and enhanced.	36	
	Building lines, set-backs and gaps	Building lines vary in the inter-war/pre-war semi-detached zone, some neighbourhoods built to formal layouts and others laid out informally. Street-wide developments should create strong building lines. Gaps between buildings should be regular, and set-backs even.	37	21 - 24
	Building orientation	Buildings should front the street to increase natural surveillance of the zone.	39	26 - 27
	Pavements	Lower densities in the zone provide space for wide pavements. Advantage should be taken of this space to provide green verges and mature planting to improve the pedestrian environment in the zone and to increase capacity for natural habitats across the settlement.	41	29 - 30
	Open Space	Links from the zone into the countryside should be protected and enhanced, particular those lying at the eastern and western edges of the settlement.	43, 45 - 46	32 - 35
Making connections	Land use	There are small shops along Redhill Road and Strathmore Avenue. Unoccupied shops detract from the streetscene and perceptions of neighbourhood security, support should be offered to find and assist occupants where there are empty shops. As a settlement, Hitchin is large enough to support a small number of shops in its outlying zones, and these should be supported as they reduce car journeys into the centre and provide some community cohesion.	49	
	Circulation, demand and linkages	Formal layouts make through flow easy for pedestrians and motorists. This asset should be conserved and the pedestrian environment in particular should be enhanced.	50 - 51	37 - 40
	Parking	Wider streets allow for on and off-street parking, and the zone as a whole does not suffer from the parking congestion which occurs in the Historic High Density zone. Off-street parking should be promoted in new developments, although not the loss of green front gardens which enliven the streetscene and reduce the risks associated with stormwater runoff.	52 - 53	42 - 45
	Streetscape elements	Medium-sized open front gardens are an important feature of this zone and can accommodate a large variety of planting, including mature trees. Low boundary walls increase the likelihood that the public will benefit from this.	54	47 - 51
Quality of the public realm	Security	High hedges in medium-sized front gardens reduce visual connectivity between the public and private realm, and should be discouraged.	56	53

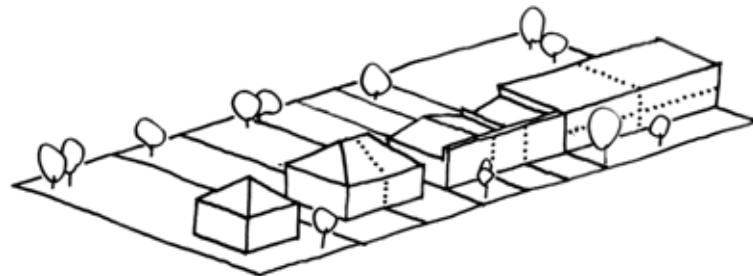
PRE-WAR/INTER-WAR SEMI-DETACHED ZONE - INFILL SITES

These case studies demonstrate the two typologies of the Low Density Mixed Residential Zone, and how densities within could be increased in the second of the two.



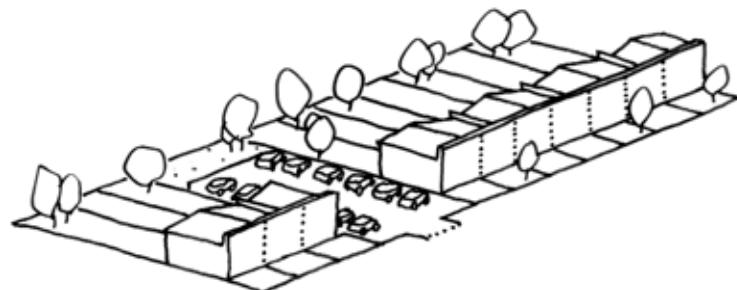
CASE STUDY PWSD1:Typical density

This case study shows two-storey semi-detached housing. Infill in these areas should respect existing typology.



CASE STUDY PWSD2:Typical density

This case study shows a mixture of housing types, characteristic of some parts of the zone.

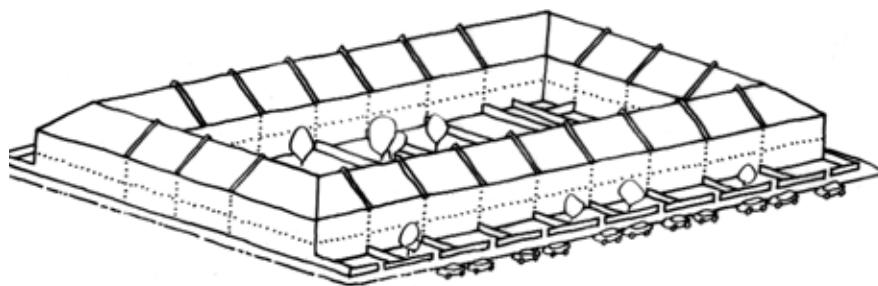


CASE STUDY PWSD2: Enhanced density

This case study shows the extension of terraces into a previously lower density area. A communal parking area removes parking congestion from the street.

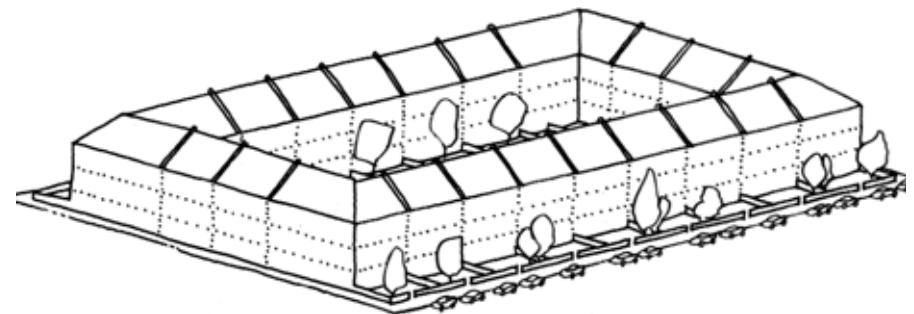
PRE-WAR/INTER-WAR SEMI-DETACHED ZONE - BLOCK SITES

This case study demonstrates how densities could be increased in a block-scale opportunity site.



CASE STUDY PWSD3: Enhanced density

This case study shows a three storey block, formed of terraces, suitable to accommodate enhanced densities.



CASE STUDY PWSD3: Increased density

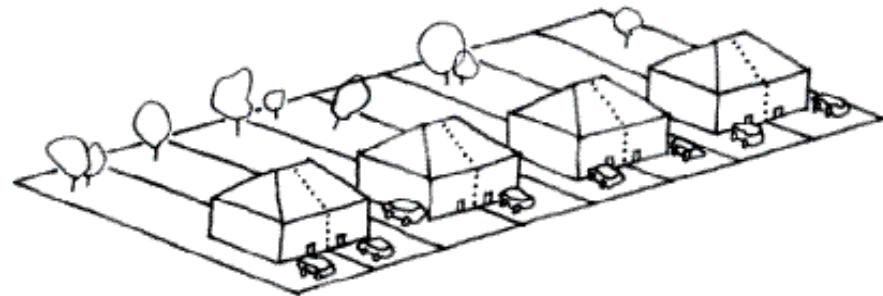
This case study shows a three storey block, formed of terraces, suitable to accommodate increased densities in areas where existing densities are already high.

URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES: LOW DENSITY MIXED RESIDENTIAL ZONE

	Criteria	Guidelines	Page Reference	Photo Reference
Making places	Building types	This zone includes a range of typologies, which may be reflected in new developments in the zone. Where the typology is predominantly detached and semi-detached, such as at The Avenue, these should be prioritised. Otherwise, terraces could be used to increase densities.	24 - 25	
	Materials / architectural styles	Modern materials and styles could enhance areas where properties are of a mix of ages. Infill should reflect existing materials and styles in parts of the zone where there is a high concentration of Victorian, Edwardian and Inter-war properties.	27	3-7
	Listed buildings/ Conservation Area	A small section of the zone east of Windmill Hill falls under the Conservation Area, protecting the expansive Victorian and Edwardian Villas on The Avenue and Chiltern Road. Where open sites offer the possibility for new designs, they should closely reflect existing materials, styles and scale in this area.	29 - 30	
	Building heights and massing	Varied building heights in this zone allow for a degree of flexibility towards building heights, so long as they remain inconspicuous within Hitchin's skyline as a whole (2 and 3 storeys).	31	9-12
	Density	In mixed areas, lower density areas could accommodate higher densities.		15-16
	Topography	Building heights should complement views in Hitchin's undulating topography (see town centre text).	33	18-19
Continuity and enclosure	Morphology	The straight and curvilinear layouts found in this zone should be protected and enhanced. Cul-de-sac infill developments should be avoided.	36	
	Building lines, setbacks and gaps	Consistent building lines along formal layouts should be retained, particularly in higher density areas. Setbacks should be small and gaps regular.	38	21 - 24
	Building Orientation	The fronts of buildings should face the street with entrances facing onto it.	39	26 - 27
	Pavements	All new developments should have pavements along the roads, with wide grass verges where space allows. Existing grass verges should be retained and well-kept.	41 42	29 -30
	Pattern of open space	Small green spaces in the zone should be protected and enhanced. Links with the surrounding countryside should be protected. Planting in streets should be protected and enhanced, and rear gardens should back onto each other to encourage sustainable habitats. Back-to-back gardens should be encouraged, in order to promote wildlife corridors and privacy.	44, 45 - 46	32 - 35
Making connections	Land use	This zone is residential and should retain this character.		
	Circulation, demand and linkages	The straight and curvilinear streets in the zone make for smooth through-flow and easy pedestrian access, and should be a model for future development. Pedestrian routes are well-used and should be well-maintained. Measures should be taken to address perceived security risks in narrow or dark alleyways.	51	37 - 40
	Parking	Off-street parking is common in this zone and should be encouraged in future developments.	52	42 - 45
Quality of the public realm	Streetscape elements	Lower densities give this zone room for wide verges and mature trees. Front gardens should be open plan, so that low hedging may be encouraged.	54 - 55	47 - 51
	Security	Where appropriate, increased densities can enhance natural surveillance. Pedestrian alleyways should be made as open and as well-lit as possible to encourage their wider use.	56 - 57	53

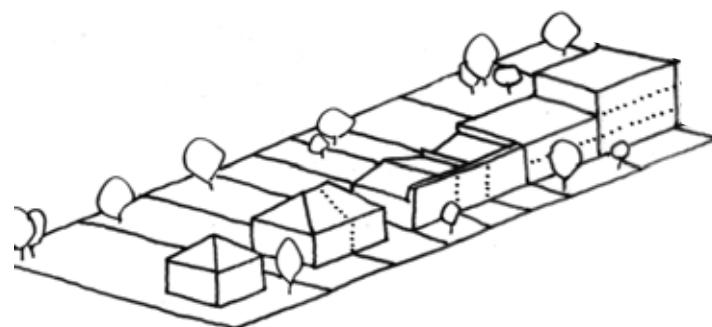
CASE STUDIES: LOW DENSITY MIXED RESIDENTIAL ZONE - INFILL SITES

These case studies demonstrate the two typologies of the Low Density Mixed Residential Zone, and how densities within could be increased in the second of the two.



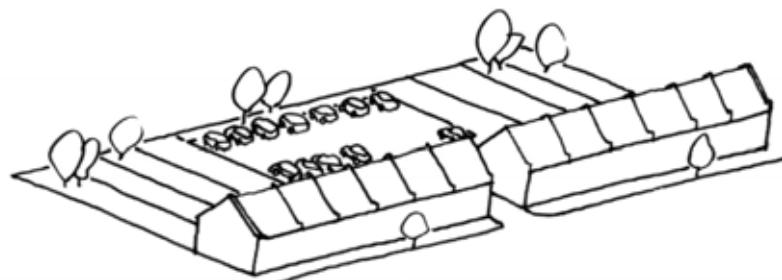
CASE STUDY LDMR1:Typical density

This case study shows two-storey semi-detached housing. Infill in these areas should respect existing typology.



CASE STUDY LDMR2:Typical density

This case study shows a mixture of housing types, characteristic of some parts of the zone.

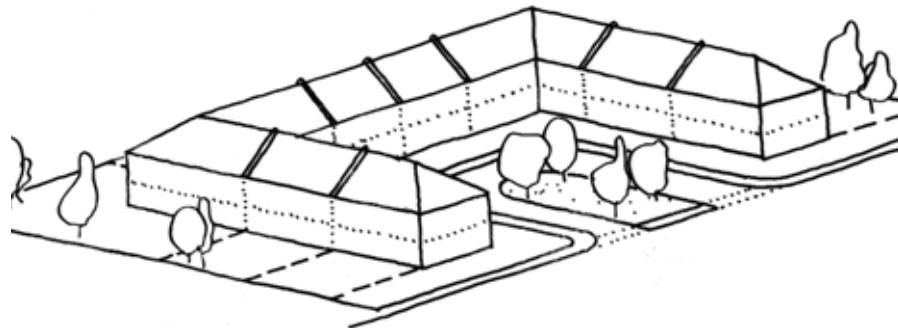


CASE STUDY LDMR2: Enhanced density

This case study shows the extension of terraces into a previously lower density area. A communal parking area removes parking congestion from the street.

CASE STUDIES: LOW DENSITY MIXED RESIDENTIAL ZONE - BLOCK SITES

This case study demonstrates how the typical typologies of the Low Density Mixed Residential zone could be increased at a block level.



CASE STUDY LDMR2: Enhanced density

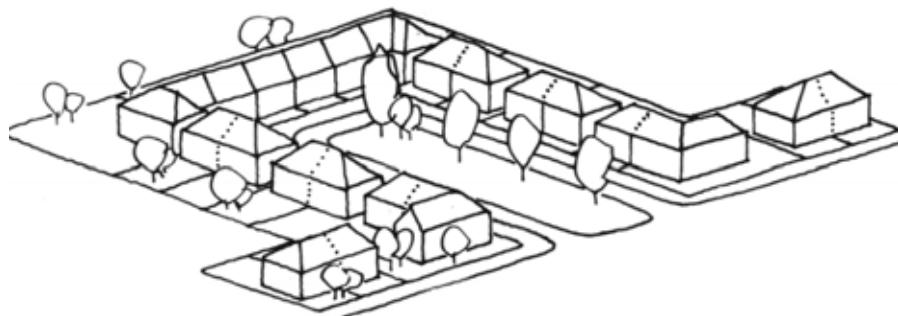
This case study shows a two-storey close which could replace a mixed density block. The crescent could accommodate parking in order to keep the access road free.

URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES: POST-WAR SUBURBAN ZONE

	Criteria	Guidelines	Page Reference	Photo Reference
Making places	Building types	This zone as a whole contains a wide range of building types and therefore allows a degree of flexibility towards new development. However in streets where typology and density are consistent so as to create a distinctive neighbourhood character, this should be adhered to.	25	
	Materials / architectural styles	This zone contains a variety of architectural styles which clearly display the decades in which they were built. Contemporary designs would be suited to the zone, adding to the mix of styles here, so long as quality remains a priority.	28	3-7
	Listed buildings/ Conservation Area	N/A		
	Building heights and massing	Building heights are mostly two storey, although there are higher blocks of flats in some areas. Building heights should not dominate the neighbourhood or the Hitchin's largely consistent roofscape which brings out the local topography, but three storeys could be accommodated at block sites.	32	9-12
	Density	Densities range largely on a street-by-street basis. Higher densities are not encouraged in parts of this zone which are distant from the town centre and the station.		15-16
	Topography	Hitchin's topography offers excellent views of the town centre and surrounding countryside from many parts of the Post-war Suburban zone, aided by consistent building heights. This feature should not be compromised by inappropriately tall buildings.	34	18-19
Continuity and enclosure	Morphology	Much Post-war Suburban development is based around isolated cul-de-sacs. The use of through streets is encouraged over the development of cul-de-sacs, with a particular emphasis on pedestrian routes which are a strong feature of Hitchin.	36	
	Building lines, setbacks and gaps	Informal layouts create weak building lines, irregular setbacks and inactive frontages. Any new residential development should strive to create continuous active street frontages with houses addressing corner plots. Strong building lines in new developments should be continued.	38	21 - 24
	Building orientation	The fronts of buildings should face the street, with entrances providing direct access onto the pavement. Many of the current developments have garden walls backing onto streets. Front gardens should have low boundaries or be open plan, allowing planting to enliven the street.	40	26 - 27
	Pavements	Wide pavements should be provided, and accommodate planting and greenery in order to encourage pedestrian movement through the zone.	42	29 -30
	Open space	Wide streets with little or no planting in the public realm can feel bare. Low densities should be seen as an opportunity to bring a rural character to the urban realm, with the capacity for wide verges and medium to large trees. Hard landscaping should be discouraged in front gardens as it reduces the absorption of stormwater runoff. Rear gardens should be back-to-back in order to increase the size of continuous habitats and promote privacy.	44, 46	32 - 35
Making connections	Land use	This zone is pre-dominantly residential	49	
	Circulation, demand and linkages	Cul-de-sac development in the zone restricts traffic flow and access in the area, and future development should favour easily navigable street layouts. There are pedestrian connections throughout the zone, but they do not provide the most direct routes; existing pedestrian routes should be enhanced and well signposted, and new developments should incorporate generous pedestrian paths which offer direct and sustainable routes towards the town centre. Perceived security threats in pedestrian alleyways should be addressed.	51	37 - 40
	Parking	On street parking should be encouraged where roads can be wide enough to accommodate cars without constricting traffic flow, and roads should be built wide enough for on-street parking.	53	42 - 45
Quality of the public realm	Streetscape elements	Wide verges and planting should be retained and maintained. New developments should incorporate space for these elements within the streetscape.	55	47 - 51
	Security	New developments should front onto the road to promote natural surveillance.	57	53

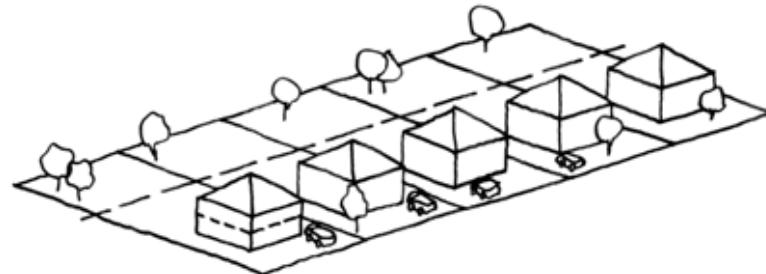
CASE STUDIES: POST-WAR SUBURBAN ZONE - INFILL SITES

This page considers the typical typologies of the Postwar estates.



CASE STUDY PWS1: Typical density

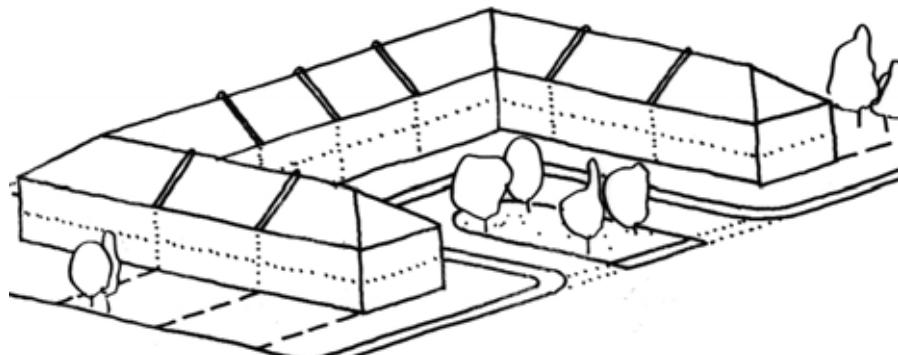
This case study represents a mixture of high density semi-detached and terraced houses. Infill should repeat heights, small gaps and short setbacks.



CASE STUDY PWS2: Typical density

This case study shows low density detached buildings, characteristic of much of the earlier development in the zone. Where densities are consistent enough to create a strong neighbourhood character, this should be retained.

CASE STUDIES: POST-WAR SUBURBAN ZONE - BLOCK SITES



CASE STUDY PWS3: Enhanced Density

This case study shows a terraced block which could replace lower densities in parts of the zone close to the town centre or the station.

MAKING PLACES BUILDING TYPES

Town Centre zone

The Town Centre zone retains a medieval layout with narrow plots, giving rise to continuous frontage of timberframe and rendered buildings along its main streets. Plots along the north end of Bancroft are larger, sometimes the result of later development over several smaller medieval plots, giving the frontage a more expansive and grand character. The Town Centre zone contains a number of other building types such as the Churchgate shopping centre, a 1970s complex which occupies the entire eastern side of Market Place, or, to the north-east of the church, the large offices on the corner of Portmill Lane.



1. Town houses of various sizes form a continuous frontage in Market Square.

Historic High Density zone

This zone contains Victorian terraces at Baliol Road and Lancaster Road, villas at Lancaster Avenue and Bearton Avenue, and later infill across the zone, including semi-detached houses and detached bungalows.



2. Hermitage Road - a continuous frontage of large town houses with ground floor retail, all built during the 1920s.

Inter-war/Pre-war Semi-detached zone

Two-storey semi-detached houses are found across the different sections of the Inter-war/pre-war Semi-detached zone. There are wide continuous semi-detached houses at The Crescent, set round a long strip of grass. Some areas contain a mix of house ages and a mix of types, including detached houses, bungalows and semi-detached houses, as seen, for example, at Pirton Road.

Low Density Mixed Residential zone

KEY ISSUES MPI: BUILDING TYPES

MP1A

Streets in the Town Centre zone are dominated by continuous frontages of narrow buildings, with later developments across several plots, including some larger post-war developments.

MP1B

The range of housing types in the outer zones varies much more than in the centre.



3. Victorian terraced houses on Lancaster Road, Historic High Density zone.



4. The Crescent, a block of inter-war houses, styled as a continuous frontage of paired houses, Inter/Pre-war Semi-detached zone.

MAKING PLACES BUILDING TYPES

In this zone, houses are either detached or semi-detached. East of London Road houses are mostly detached with a few semi-detached, while around The Avenue and Wymondley Road there is a more balanced mixture of the two. Linked detached houses are found in Sorrel Garth.

Post-war Suburban zone

The Post-war Suburban zone is characterised by a variety of housing types. There are streets of detached bungalows, for example, at Meadow Way, detached houses at The Paddocks, and at Highover Way/Armour Rise, two storey terraced, semi-detached, detached houses and two and three storey flats.



5. Large Edwardian detached villas on Chiltern Road (Low Density Mixed Residential zone).



6. Semi-detached housing in the Post-war Suburban zone at Coleridge Close, Post-war Suburban zone.



7. Three-storey blocks of flats at John Barker Place.



8. Recently built detached houses at Talbot Street (Post-war Suburban zone).

MAKING PLACES

MATERIALS / ARCHITECTURAL STYLES

Town Centre zone

The historic buildings in the town centre date largely from the late medieval period (14th to 16th centuries) with some Georgian, Victorian and twentieth century infill. Materials used in the historic centre are of a high quality, built with the wealth generated by the successful industries located in Hitchin since the fifteenth century. The range of materials used in the construction of the medieval town are limited mainly to timber with later brick and clay render. Imported stone is used for the Church of St Mary the Virgin and for the Priory. Victorian houses use Welsh slate and yellow gault bricks. There are a range of styles in the centre; many timber framed and rendered cottages, along with a mixture of Georgian and Victorian buildings and formal Georgian and early Victorian civic styles around the Market Place. The variety of styles, materials and colours, structured by similar scales and densities gives the centre an ordered, but detailed and lively appearance. The town centre also contains much modern infill, usually plain in style and respecting existing materials and scale, usually of brick. The Churchgate Shopping Centre, is an exception, being of an outspoken 1970s modernist design, incorporating sloped roofs and narrow horizontal and vertical windows. Bancroft, opened up in 1875, consists entirely of architecture from the 1920s, and has its own strong and distinct character, with a uniform brick colour and even building heights.

Historic High Density zone

Victorian terraces and Edwardian villas are mostly of red



1. Elegantly decorated eaves supporting a projected first floor, common among timber framed houses in the Town Centre zone.



3. Later infill respects existing materials and styles within the Town Centre zone.



3. The Churchgate shopping centre is the most prominent of a small number of buildings which do not fit into the existing historic ensemble.



4. A Victorian house on Baliol Road; red brick with a white castellated bay window.

KEY ISSUES

MP2: MATERIALS/ARCHITECTURAL STYLES

MP2A

The Town Centre zone contains a range of attractive historic styles, including some grand buildings in Market Place.

MP2B

A number of post-war buildings in the Town Centre zone do not respond to the historic fabric.

MAKING PLACES

MATERIALS / ARCHITECTURAL STYLES

brick, as is much of the later infill in the zone, along with some pebble dash among the semi-detached Victorian villas along Lancaster Avenue/Bearton Avenue. Houses often have slate roofs, steep gables, bay windows and recessed doorways along with brick detailing of window, door and porch lintels, some of which are painted white. While Victorian and Edwardian periods display details such as decorated eaves and crenellated bay windows, Edwardian houses tend to be plainer and more square in form. Along Baliol Road later large red brick houses are connected by glass walkways and have decorated gables, concrete roof tiles on hipped roofs.

Inter/Pre-war Semi-detached zone

Houses in this zone are often made from brick and have large hipped roofs. At The Crescent, houses are painted white and share a brown tiled roof. Each house has symmetrically placed windows and plain door and window mouldings. At Tristram Avenue, houses are dressed with stone-chipped cladding. Willian Road and Purwell Lane consist of 1930s and 1950s housing with Victorian terracing. Houses are brick with tile cladding, while some have hipped roofs and central chimneys. Lucas Lane is an area of pebble-dash white bungalows with brown tiled roofs. Pirtton Road contains an inter-war housing estate with later infill, including houses in red brick and pebble dash, brown brick and timber frame gables. Roofs are of red, brown and bright orange tiling. Bearton Green contains houses with Art Deco porches and pediments.



5. Art Deco detailing moulding over the doors of a semi-detached inter-war house on Bearton Green.



6. Timberframe render with brick ground floor and recessed porches - typical details of inter-war semi-detached houses.



7. White timber frames and porch on an Edwardian villa in Chiltern Road.



8. A tile-clad 1970s house sits alongside a half-hipped 1930s white brick house in the Low Density Mixed-use Residential zone (The Chilterns).

MAKING PLACES

MATERIALS / ARCHITECTURAL STYLES

Low Density Mixed Residential zone

There are a variety of styles from the late nineteenth and twentieth century in this zone, a majority of which date from the 1880s to 1930s. Around The Avenue/Chiltern Road there are large Victorian and Edwardian houses in red brick, some with render and others with brick detail and tile hanging. Some have timber detailing on doors, porches and eaves. South of Wymondley Road, houses display a variety of styles and materials, although most are built of brick with plaster cladding and painted render.

Post-war Suburban zone

This zone contains a range of ages from after 1945 and therefore a variety of styles. Houses around St Michaels Road/Gibson Close, for example, are of brown and yellow brick with shallow pitched roofs and brown concrete tiles. A common post-war design is brick with tile or plastic cladding and hipped roofs, found on bungalows, (Cranborne Avenue/Hawthorn Close/Wellingham Avenue) as well as semi-detached and detached houses.

Contemporary developments, such as at Talbot street, employ light brick, concrete tiles and window lintels also finished in concrete details. Houses have bay windows with sloped leaded roofs and ground floor front extensions. The most striking feature of these houses are gable ends of varying sizes, mostly of brick, some with light timber frame cladding or painted render and edged so as to suggest a classical pediment, often framing a set of three windows with a semi-circular extension to the central window.



9.A bungalow on Meadow Way built of brown brick with a concrete-tiled hipped roof.



10. Brown brick and tile cladding on a block of flats in the Post-war Suburban zone.



11. Contemporary design at Talbot Street, with concrete tiling over windows and the suggestion of a classical pediment conveyed by the strong lines of the gable.



12. Housing at Talisman Street in the Post-war Suburban zone, showing light yellow brick and black timber cladding. Porches have tiled canopies.

MAKING PLACES LISTED BUILDINGS AND CONSERVATION AREAS

Town Centre zone

Hitchin's Conservation Area covers the whole of the Town Centre zone. It contains a large number of listed buildings and Buildings of Local Interest, and others which contribute positively to the character of the area. Hitchin's 15th century layout survives little altered, including burgage plots and what Pevsner has described as a 'real market square'. The Church of St Mary the Virgin, located to the east of Market Place, is Grade I listed and includes fine examples of 14th and 15th century work, financed by wealth from the wool trade. Market Square, and St Mary's Church just to the north of it have been the heart of Hitchin's life for centuries, and continues to be so as a beautiful spaces and landmarks. The second Grade I listed building is the Priory to the south of Bridge Street; the present building on the site dates back to the 15th century, and was remodelled in the classical style in 1775. The Priory is set in 19 acres of parkland which extends out beyond Park Way to Hitchin Hill, providing an excellent landscaped space immediately at the south of the Town Centre zone. The Biggin (Grade II*), just off Queen Street, was originally part of a Gilbertine Monastery and provides a landmark in the market area of Hitchin. The Conservation Area statement has suggested a list of improvements to a number of areas, targeting low quality and inappropriate building designs as well as public realm failings and maintenance issues.



1. St Mary's Church, a local landmark and one of the few examples of the use of stone and flint within Hitchin.



A 'real market Square' (Pevsner).

KEY ISSUES MP3: LISTED BUILDINGS AND CONSERVATION AREAS

MP3A

The Conservation Area protects Hitchin's medieval street pattern and a number of historically significant buildings.

MP3B

The Conservation Area extends beyond the town centre to incorporate a number of fine Victorian and Edwardian Villas around Highbury Road.

MP3C

Signage, street furniture and paving matches the quality of the historic architecture. However, too much signage can give the Town Centre a cluttered appearance.



3. Buildings constructed on narrow plots in the High Street.

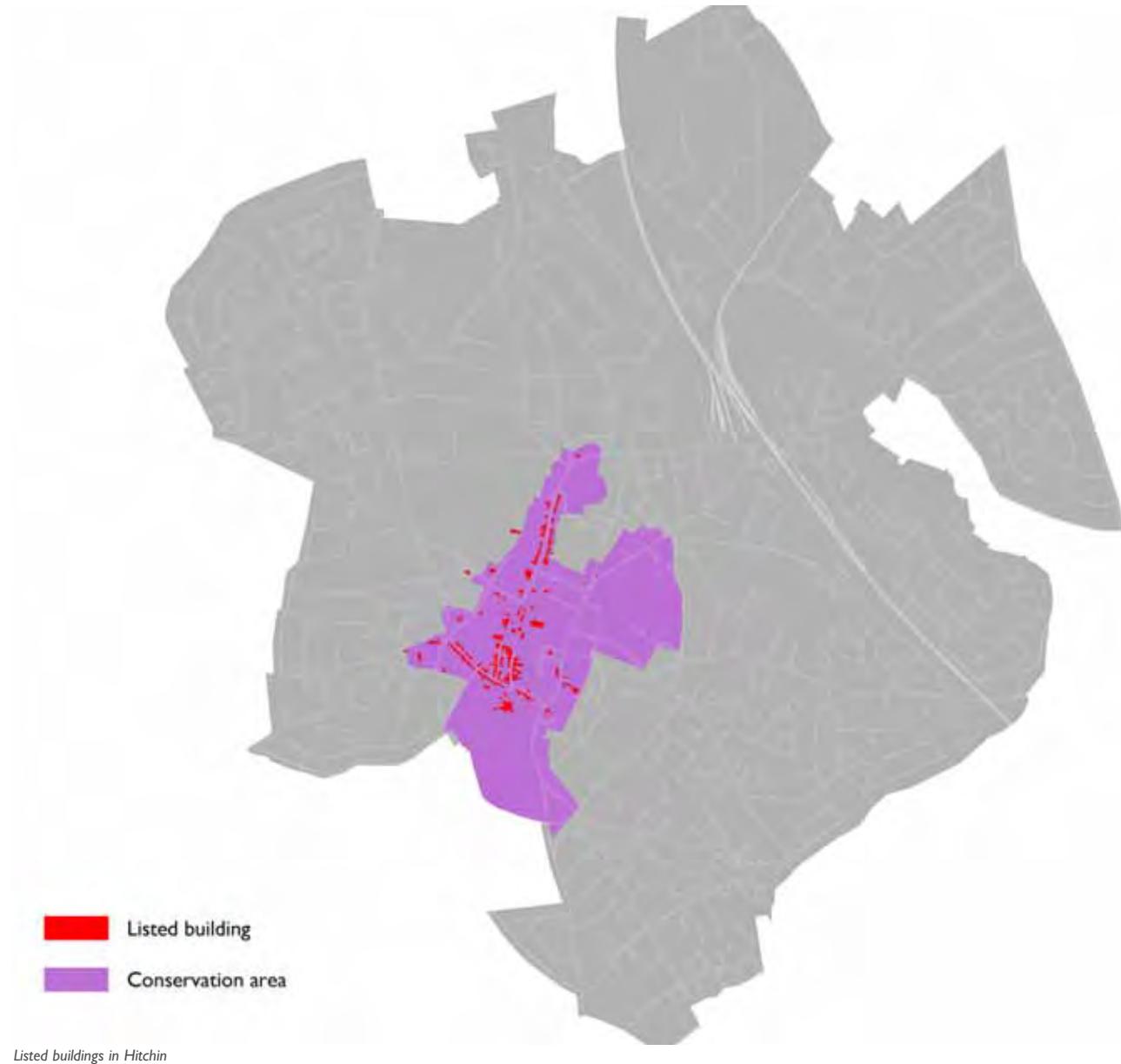


4. The Conservation Area extends to cover the Victorian and Edwardian residential districts to the east of Windmill Hill.

MAKING PLACES
LISTED BUILDINGS AND
CONSERVATION AREAS

Low Density Mixed Residential zone

The Conservation Area extends eastwards to incorporate Victorian and Edwardian red brick semi-detached houses located around Walsworth Road and Highbury Road.



MAKING PLACES BUILDING HEIGHTS AND MASSING

Town Centre zone

Building heights vary along the continuous frontages which line the streets around Market Place. This creates lively elevations throughout the zone as a whole. Buildings are mostly three storey, with some two storey, although rooflines do not always match. Historic styles generally adapt massing to a human scale throughout the zone; classical and Georgian facades are broken down into symmetrical portions using columns, pilasters and windows, and earlier timber-frame houses are often divided into gabled sections. Stories and smaller plots are demarcated within the façade of the Churchgate shopping centre in Market Place, but this design fails to prevent the building's massing from dominating the square.

Historic High Density zone

The Victorian and Edwardian terraces and villas in this zone are largely two storey, and of a similar massing. Infill in the area is mostly two storey with some three-storey and bungalows.

Inter-war/Pre-war Semi-detached zone

Houses from the inter-war and pre-war period are characteristically two-storey and of a domestic scale.

Low Density Mixed Residential zone

This zone contains a majority of two and three-storey buildings with some bungalow heights. In the area around London Road and Gosmore Road housing is mostly two-storey with a few Bungalows. There are



1. Even heights within the Town Centre zone increase the strength of the building lines formed by the continuous frontages found on many of the streets within the zone.



2. The Churchgate Centre occupies the eastern elevation of Market Place. Its massing is conspicuously out of character with the other buildings in the square, and with the majority of the buildings in the Town Centre zone.



3. Victorian two-storey terraces offering a single building height along the street, broken by bungalow infill.



4. Regular building heights form a feature on Pirton Road.

KEY ISSUES MP4: BUILDING HEIGHTS AND MASSING

MP4A

The massing of the Churchgate Shopping Centre dominates Market Place.

MP4B

Building heights show subtle variation in all zones, enhancing streets where building lines are strong, and providing interesting and lively roovescapes.

MP4C

Blocks of flats in the Low Density Mixed Residential, and Post-war Suburban zones are not in keeping with their two-storey surroundings.

MAKING PLACES BUILDING HEIGHTS AND MASSING

detached and semi-detached Victorian and Edwardian houses of two and three storeys along The Avenue, Chiltern Road and White Hall Road some of them of a large massing. At the corner of Highbury and Wymondley Road there is a three-storey block of flats which breaks with the overall character of the area.

Post-war Suburban zone

Estates built of single design units convey a strong sense of coherence due to a standard height, visible for example at Coleridge Close or Meadow Way. In other areas, such as Foster Drive, there is a mix of two-storey and three-storey town houses. North of Meadow way there are medium-high rise flats which dominate their immediate surroundings.

In more contemporary developments, heights are often even, and combine with high densities to produce strong building lines.



5. Regular building heights in the Low-density Mixed Residential zone draw out the gentle gradient of Chiltern Road.



6. Four-storey flats at Wratten Road dominates its surrounds.



7. Single design units bring out the local topography with consistent building heights.



8. Even massing and heights in the higher density contemporary areas creates a strong sense of order and enclosure.

MAKING PLACES TOPOGRAPHY

Town Centre zone

The centre of Hitchin is relatively flat. An exception is the gentle slope running down from Bridge Street to Tilehouse Street, and then up again along Tilehouse Street itself, inducing the eye along the rise and fall of the roofscape on this street. Windmill Hill, on the eastern edge of the town, provides excellent views over the town centre.

Historic High Density zone

The Victorian and Edwardian developments located to the north of Hitchin are situated on flat ground. The slight rise on Oughton Head Lane provides the open space there with a pleasing vista along the adjacent terraced streets.

Inter/Pre-war Semi-detached zone

Offley Road and Pirton Road lead into Hitchin over a ridge, adding interest to the streetscape looking south west, and affording excellent views of the Hertfordshire countryside from the top of the ridge itself. A south-west facing slope around Woolgrove Road/High Dane/Tristram Avenue provides open views across Walsworth Common.

Low Density Mixed Residential zone

Wymondley Road/Wymondley Close/Sorrel Garth/The Chilterns/Sandover Close sit at the top of a ridge. This affords excellent views out over the countryside south-eastwards, as well as making an interesting streetscape along The Avenue and Chiltern Road.



1. The gradient leading down Tilehouse Street to Bridge Street.



2. The steep gradient of Windmill Hill, providing the public an excellent view of the town centre.

KEY ISSUES MP5: TOPOGRAPHY

MP5A

Hitchin's topography is an important feature of the town's character, forming undulating neighbourhoods and excellent views throughout the town.



3. Views across Purwell from Coleridge Close.

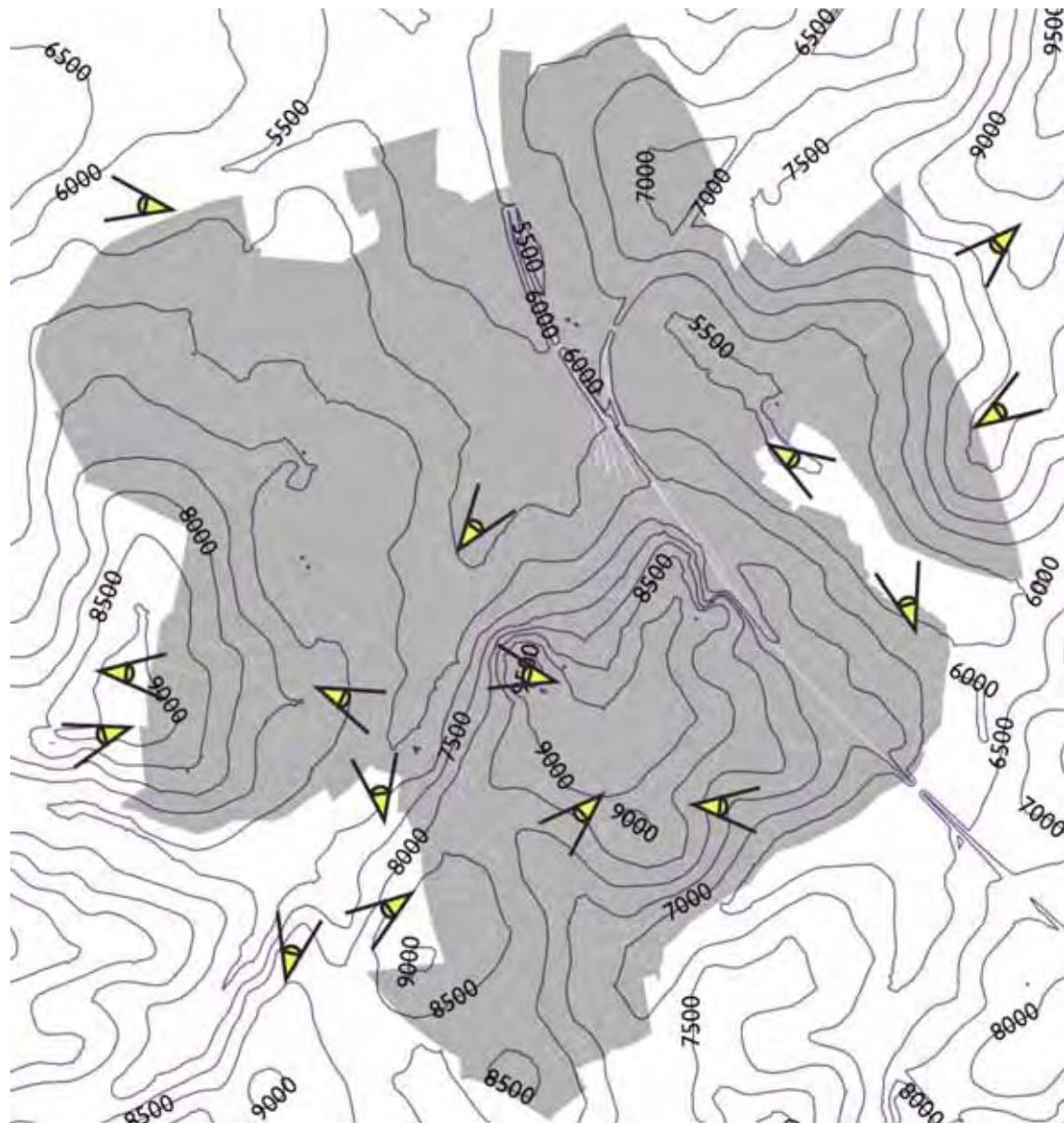


4. The Hertfordshire countryside from the inter-war/pre-war Semi-detached zone, Lucas Lane.

MAKING PLACES TOPOGRAPHY

Post-war Suburban zone

A south-easterly slope along Ninesprings Way creates excellent views into the countryside.



Hitchin's topography (contour lines shown in centimetres), showing the vantage points it offers.

CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE TOWN MORPHOLOGY

The Town Centre zone

The Town Centre is thought to have originated between a Roman crossing over the River Hiz at Bridge Street and a Roman route leading north up Bancroft. The medieval layout grew around a planned core, structured around Market Square and St Mary's Church. Temporary Market stalls, located in between Bucklersbury/High Street and Sun Street/Church Yard, grew into permanent shops, workshops and houses, leaving the streets either side of them very narrow. Population growth between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries remained concentrated around Market Place, and extended along the main route north. Bancroft, supported by the strong corn and wool markets, local trades and industries such as brick-making or coopersing. Bancroft was the site of a cattle market until 1901, and is left with a generous width. Another wide street, Brand Street, was the historic access route from Bedford, and Hermitage Road was created in 1875 to aid traffic flow to the station via Walsworth Road.

Historic High Density zone

In the 19th century Victorian terraces were sited to the north of Hitchin to house the town's rapidly expanding labour force, particularly those working at the extensive sidings at Hitchin station, located a mile to the north east of the town centre. As with similar developments across the country at this time, a land company bought up fields to the north and north-east of Hitchin and prepared them for development by dividing them into small, regular plots of land with relatively narrow but

KEY ISSUES CEI:TOWN MORPHOLOGY

CEIA

Hitchin has a strong urban structure, with developments located in roughly concentric circles, with dense town centre fabric, open land, Victorian perimeter blocks, pre-war/inter-war long permeable streets, and, finally, the peripheral curvilinear streets or cul-de-sac areas.

CEIB

The Town Centre zone is very permeable to pedestrians, an asset which has been carried across into the outer zones.

CEIC

The proximity of the town centre to open space creates a unique relationship.

CEID

The railway line, a barrier within the town, appears as a significant linear gap in the town's morphology.



I. Town centre morphology.

CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE TOWN MORPHOLOGY

straight and square access roads.

Inter/Pre-war Semi-detached zone

Pre-war and Inter-war suburban development followed as an extension of the Victorian housing north of Hitchin, and in clusters lying in an arc around the earlier developments. Plots are wider and layouts, while still rectilinear, incorporate triangles and crescents.

Low Density Mixed Residential zone

There are two main blocks of Low Density Mixed Residential development. One is located at the south of Hitchin around Stevenage Road, the other along Wymondley Road.

Post-war Suburban zone

Post-war Suburban growth comprises a large portion of Hitchin's built-up area, forming a fragmented ring around the other zones. Developments include informal layouts, intended to create small, secluded neighbourhoods. More recent developments are found dispersed around Hitchin in small pockets, located on parcels of land which have become available recently, as the expansion of the town has become restrained by planning restrictions. Wedgwood Close, for example, is former railway lands.



2. Urban morphology of Hitchin.

CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE BUILDING LINES, SETBACKS AND GAPS

Town Centre zone

The strong building lines resulting from Hitchin's unchanged 15th century street pattern constitute one of the town's main features. The continuous wall of detailed facades, built on the narrow burgage plots and fronting directly onto the pavement, creates very strong building lines. Setbacks are narrow, with access routes often incorporated into the facades of buildings. This creates a strong sense of enclosure around the streets of the Town Centre zone as a whole, and is strongest in the Market Square where continuous building lines heighten the feeling of spaciousness.



1. Strong building lines arising from the continuous frontages within the Town Centre zone are one of the zone's distinctive features.

Historic High Density zone

Similarly designed terraces in this zone form strong building lines. This is aided by the linear road layout of the zone, especially where infill hasn't been grafted onto the existing fabric and doesn't match existing building heights or scale. Short front gardens emphasise building lines.



2. On Hermitage Road properties built during the same decade share a common building height and window heights. Slight facade variations keep the elevation interesting, and create a very strong building line.

Inter-war Semi-detached zone

Houses are often set back from the road in this zone, with wide gardens at the front, lessening the impact of their building lines on the street. Houses in straight lines with regular medium-sized gaps have stronger building lines, with some very strong ones at The Crescent and Strathmore Avenue where there are terraces of inter-war houses here, with small or no front gardens.

Low Density Mixed Residential zone

KEY ISSUES CE2: BUILDING LINES, SETBACKS, GAPS

CE2A

The historic plots in the Town Centre zone give it strong building lines. This is also true of 19th century Hermitage Road where a single style and choice of building materials is employed.

CE2B

Building lines are relatively strong among Victorian, pre-war and some contemporary developments, with terracing or regular gaps.

CE2C

Weak building lines are found in the Post-war Suburban and Low Density Mixed Residential zone, formed by block-level housing gaps and low density cul-de-sacs.



3. Terracing creates strong building lines in the Historic High Density zone.



4. The regular rhythm of gaps along a straight road creates a strong building line among inter-war semi-detached houses.

CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE BUILDING LINES, SETBACKS AND GAPS

Building lines are weak in areas such as London Road and Priory Way where an informal layout has been favoured, incorporating cul-de-sacs, loop roads and large gaps between houses. Building lines are stronger at Dale Close where houses are set around amenity greens. In The Avenue/Chiltern Road/Whitehall Road, in contrast, Victorian and Edwardian plots are laid out to follow the line of the road in a more formal arrangement, although setbacks vary. Informal layouts off Wymondley Road create weak building lines.

Post-war Suburban zone

Estates in this zone are often set around cul-de-sacs, and so do not always benefit from linear roads. However, building lines are relatively strong in many single-design estates, where unit heights are standardised, gaps between them narrow and setbacks even. Blocks of flats and tall terraces in the Post-war Suburban zone, such as at Bingen Road, do not create strong building lines; although they form a continuous façade along their length, they aren't generally long enough to create a street-scale impression. Houses are often staggered, as at Hine Way, Moss Way and Highover Way. Houses laid out to form square cul-de-sacs at Symonds Road and Talbot Street have strong building lines, with narrow gaps, gentle setbacks, and level ground floor projections. Blocks of flats at Wedgewood Road do not create strong building lines.



5. Edwardian villas sit equally spaced along formal (straight) roads in the Low Density Mixed Residential zone, creating strong building lines.



6. Blocks of flats at Binges Road in the Post-war Suburban zone do create strong building lines at block level, but not at a street-long scale where large gaps accompany them.



7. A spacious road lined with bungalows: Meadow Way.



8. Even building heights with narrow gaps in a recent development.

CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE BUILDING ORIENTATION

Town Centre zone

The historic buildings in the Town Centre zone face directly onto the streets, most of them built right up to the pavement. Unique buildings group to form varied elevations creating an active and vibrant street frontage throughout the majority of the zone.

This is unmatched in the outer zones, where houses are of a similar design.

Historic High Density zone

Terraces and villas in the Historic High Density zone are built along linear streets which they face. The high density of these frontages establish an active street frontage on the whole. This effect is diminished where properties have large front hedges, removing natural surveillance from the street.

Inter/Pre-war Semi-detached zone

Inter and Pre-war Semi-detached houses are set facing the road. Wide windows provide their occupants with a good view of the street, and in some areas short front gardens discourage large hedges. However, where there are larger front gardens, such as at Pirton Road, hedges obscure the view between street and house, creating lengths of inactive frontage.

Low Density Mixed Residential zone

Much of the housing in this zone dates from the Victorian through to the inter-war period, with most houses facing the road, and some of the houses built up



1. Active street frontage on High Street.



2. High densities in the Historic High Density zone create high levels of natural surveillance on the street.

KEY ISSUES CE4: BUILDING ORIENTATION

CE3A

Unique buildings in the Town Centre zone create interesting elevations and a very vibrant street frontage.

CE3B

Active frontages in the higher density areas of the outlying zones comprise a shared characteristic and link with the Town Centre zone.

CE3C

High hedging creates blank frontages in the Low Density Mixed Residential and Post-war Suburban zones.

CE3D

Houses facing cul-de-sacs leave blank frontage to their access roads.



3. Lengths of high hedging create an inactive frontage along Pirton Road.



4. Frontages in the Low Density Mixed Residential zone are mostly active, although sometimes obscured by hedging and fences.

CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE BUILDING ORIENTATION

to or close to the kerb, giving the area active street frontages. This effect is limited by the presence of larger properties with generous front gardens, set back from the street, and obscured by large hedges and shrubs.

Post-war Suburban zone

The majority of developments employ a linear layout with houses set at the front of plots with small open plan gardens bordering the pavement. The other common layout in the zone is the cul-de-sac, providing a reasonable level of surveillance over their access roads, but not to the rear of developments. At Westmill Lane, blocks of flats are set square to their access roads, offering windowless frontages to the street. Higher densities in more recent developments create active street frontages.



5. Buildings set square to the roadside can offer less active frontages, but open plan gardens allow free interplay between the frontage and the street (Post-war Suburban zone).



6. Houses face their own cul-de-sacs, creating blank frontages on their access road (Post-war Suburban zone).



7. Bay windows create active frontages in a contemporary development.



8. Higher densities in contemporary developments increase frontage activity.

CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE PAVEMENTS

Town Centre zone

The immediate town centre, a pedestrian dominated area that contains a variety of paving surfaces, and was subject to a public realm upgrading project during the 1990s, leaving the area with high quality pavements. The market square consists of a cobblestone centre bordered by York paving. Cobbles are also found along High Street and Church Street, both pedestrianised. Churchyard Walk is laid with smoothed bricks, paired to make a pattern of squares. Pavements in this area are level with the pedestrianised road. Outside of the historic streets there are poor quality asphalt pavements.



1. Narrow and wide stone cobbles in the pedestrian-dominated Market Square.



2. Brick squares paving Churchyard Walk.

Historic High Density zone

Victorian and Edwardian developments in the Historic High Density zone characteristically employ narrow pavements, evident, for example, around Lancaster Road, Lancaster Avenue and Baliol Road. Pavements are laid with pavestone and asphalt sections.

Inter/Pre-war Semi-detached zone

Pavement widths vary, but are not usually narrow. Pirton Road and Redhill Road, for example, have very wide pavements, while along Strathmore Avenue there are narrow pavements with wide verges, and at Beerton Road, narrow pavements without grass verges.

Low Density Mixed Residential zone

Lower density developments in this zone incorporate sizeable pavements and often have room for medium to large grass verges. The Chilterns is lined with grass



3. Narrow pavement in the Historic High Density zone.



4. A narrow pavement and wide road in the Pre-war/Inter-war Semi-detached zone.

KEY ISSUES CE4: PAVEMENTS

CE4A

Pavements in the Town Centre zone are of a high quality in the main access streets, but this creates a sense of neglect in some of the back streets in the zone.

CE4B

Pavements in the Historic High Density zone and some areas of the Low Density Mixed Residential zone are narrow and often dominated by parked cars.

CE4C

Areas in the Low Density Mixed Residential zone have no pavements

CE4D

Pavement parking, common in newer developments, restricts pedestrian flow.

CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE PAVEMENTS

verges instead of pavements.

Post-war Suburban zone

Many developments in this zone have wide roads with wide grass verges. Blocks of flats, as at Wratten Road, are surrounded by pedestrian paths and green verges. Lower densities in parts of this zone offer the opportunity to provide large amounts of green space. In more recent high density development, narrow pavements are bordered by open plan front gardens which create allow for a feeling of openness.



5. Grass verges replace pavements in The Chilterns.



6. Taking advantage of lower densities, wide verges create a spacious semi-rural feel in the Post-war Suburban zone.



7. Wellington Avenue in the Post-war Suburban zone; wide pavements incorporating grass verges.



8. Low hedges and narrow paving at Talbot Drive, bordered by open plan front gardens.

CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE OPEN LAND

Pattern of Open Space zone

Hitchin is well-served with designated open space as a whole. The town has a dense network of pedestrian access routes which convey pedestrians from the centre to the outskirts of town. There are several well signed and well used routes leading off into the Hertfordshire countryside.

Town Centre zone

The Town Centre contains only a small patch of grassed open space surrounding the St Mary's Church, and bordered to the East by the River Hiz. However, Hitchin's residents also enjoy a large market square, and green spaces surrounding the Town Centre zone to the north and east, such as Windmill Hill.

Historic High Density zone

This zone is bordered to the south by the publicly accessible Hitchin Boys' School and Dacre Junior School playing fields as well as Butts Close and Top Field. To the east of King's Road lies another open space with playing fields.

Inter/Pre-war Semi-detached zone

Although there are no large open spaces around Benchley Hill/Bradley's Corner, there are small amenity greens throughout the area. King George V playing fields border a section of the Inter-war/pre-war Semi-detached zone along Old Hale Way.

Low Density Mixed Residential zone

KEY ISSUES CE6: OPEN SPACE

CE5A

Hitchin is well endowed with a range of open spaces catering for sports, walking, and children's play areas.

CE5B

Hitchin's pedestrian connections into the countryside are an important feature of Hitchin.

CE5C

The area around St Mary's Church is dominated by the carpark and market stalls and is an opportunity for public realm improvements. There is a significant opportunity for a riverside walk.

CE5D

Some streets in the Post-war Suburban zone appear bare where wide streets do not accommodate planting beyond plain grass verges.

CE5E

The open spaces adjacent to the town centre serve as important transition zones between surrounding residential areas and the town centre.



1. Hitchin enjoys a dense network of pedestrian routes leading straight out into the Hertfordshire countryside.



2. Butt's Close, a large open space to the north-west of the town centre, borders sections of the Town Centre, Post-war Suburban and Historic High Density zones.



3. Walsworth Common, to the north-west of the settlement, provides an important open space to the Post-war Suburban and Inter-war/Pre-war Semi-detached zones in the north-east of Hitchin that is isolated by the railway.



4. Windmill Hill is an important open space within the town, situated between the Town Centre zone and the Low Density Mixed Residential zone to the east.

CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE OPEN LAND

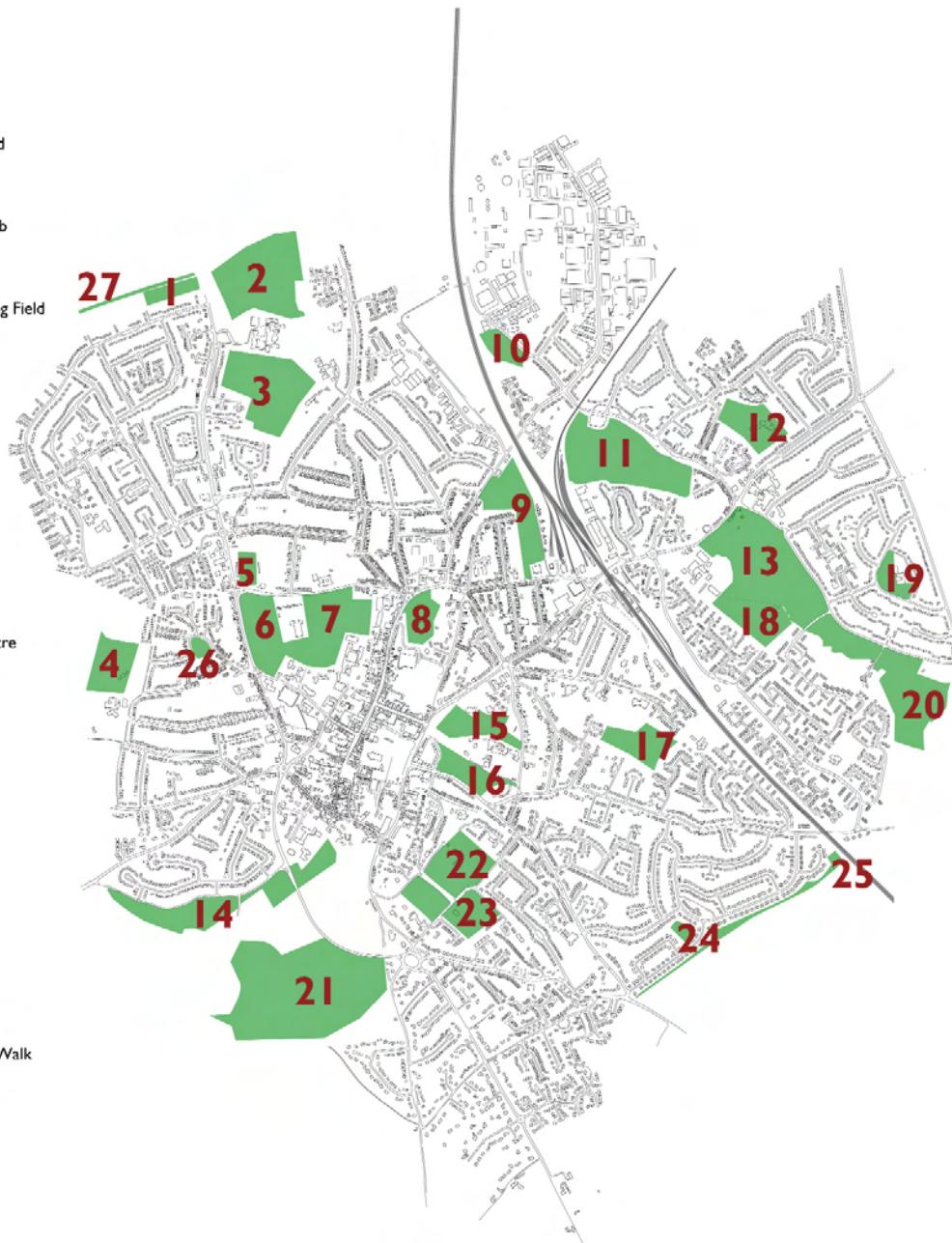
Of the largest two sections of this zone, one is set around Wymondeley Road, Highbury Road, The Avenue and Chiltern Road and has direct access to playing fields south of Pinehill Hospital and borders Windmill Hill to the West. The second block, located around Gosmore Road, sits at the edge of the settlement with several routes into the surrounding countryside. Houses situated at the north end of Highbury Road have direct access to Windmill Hill.

Post-war Suburban zone

To the north-west of the settlement, King George V Playing Field and Butt's Close border this zone along Bedford Road and to the north-east, Walsworth Common serves houses around Highover Way. In the southern half of the settlement, playing fields about Coleridge Ridge as well as Girons Close. Further south, a recreation ground borders The Maples and Trahern Close.

Designated Open Land

- 1** Playing Field
- 2** Playing Field
- 3** King George V Playing Field
- 4** Sports Ground
- 5** Hitchin Town Football Club
- 6** Butt's Close
- 7** Hitchin Boys' School Playing Field
- 8** Recreation Ground
- 9** Playing Fields
- 10** Playing Fields
- 11** Walsworth Common
- 12** Playing Field
- 13** Purwell
- 14** The Willows
- 15** Woodside Open Air Theatre
- 16** Windmill Hill
- 17** Playing Field
- 18** Playing Field
- 19** Playing Field
- 20** Recreation Ground
- 21** Priory Park
- 22** Cemetery
- 23** Recreation Ground
- 24** Playing Field
- 25** Ippollitts Brook Riverside Walk
- 26** Oughtonhead Way
- 27** Oughtonhead Common



I. Open land in Hitchin.

CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE OPEN LAND

Quality of Open Space

Town Centre zone

The market area of the Town Centre zone is generally hard landscaped, although there are a few young trees at the centre of Market Place itself. The green space to the east of the church is open and planted with some mature trees, several sitting along the bank of the River Hiz. The river is an important feature at the centre of town, and, as suggested in the Town Centre Strategy, there is a major opportunity to open up the river and create a riverside walk between Hermitage Road and Bridge Street. Non-market days leave the market stalls empty, and leaving the area with a sense of neglect.

Historic High Density zone

Victorian and Edwardian units were typically designed with short front gardens and long rear gardens. Planting of shrubs behind low boundary walls and fences in front gardens improves the quality of open space in this zone for the public, while residents enjoy larger private spaces behind their houses, often planted with mature trees. There is little public landscaping in the zone, although Lancaster Avenue is lined with trees.

Inter/Pre-war Semi-detached zone

Pre-war and Inter-war properties in this zone were designed with wide front and rear gardens, although along Old Hale Way/Strathmore Avenue, front gardens are small and square, rear gardens long and narrow. The area is enhanced by medium width grass verges with



1. The market is a large space at the centre of Hitchin which goes unused for parts of the week.



2. Market Place provides a hard-lanscaped, enclosed open space in the centre of Hitchin.



3. The space opposite the Church on the eastern side of the River Hiz, currently a car park, could accommodate a large public space with direct access to the river.



4. Short front gardens in Baliol Road, showing low boundary walls and characteristic planting.

CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE OPEN SPACE

corner splays, while along Cambridge Road there are wide grass verges with mature hedge planting. Large hedges also line much of Pirton Road and the northern side of Offley Road, concealing wide front gardens with mature trees. The Crescent fronts its own communal open space.

Low Density Mixed Residential zone

Open space in this zone is generally generous and of a high quality, although the layout of these spaces varies with the age of the development. The London Road/Gosmore Road area is of a low density with wide grass verges, open greens and extensive planting including avenues of trees. In The Avenue/Chiltern Road/Whitehall Road/Walsworth Road/Verulam Road, as a contrast, Victorian and Edwardian houses come with smaller front gardens and large rear gardens. The area is well planted with mature trees, a feature which is central to the distinct character of this area of Hitchin and the Low Density Mixed Residential zone. Heading south-east along Wymondley Road there are large gardens with mature planting and large trees. Some gardens are open plan, some secluded by hedging, and large trees line the road.

Post-war Suburban zone

The variety of developments in the Post-war Suburban zone come with varying qualities of open space. In Meadow Way, bungalows are set back from wide verges and have tidy open plan or low-walled gardens. Low roof heights and lack of trees creates a considerable feeling



5. Trees help soften the hard landscape in Lancaster Avenue.



6. The Avenue and the Chilterns are both lined with trees which greatly enhance the quality of open space here.



7. In The Chilterns green verges and hedges create a rural feel in this mostly 1930s suburb and provide a contrast to The Avenue.



8. High hedges line Pirton Road in the Inter-war/pre-war Semi-detached zone. Front gardens are wide and contain large trees.

CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE OPEN SPACE

of openness along the street. In other streets, such as Wellington Avenue, where the road is wider, the lack of trees makes the street feel bare. Ninesprings Way/Oakfield Avenue/Broadmead/Uplands Way, by contrast, have narrow verges and amenity areas. Medium-sized gardens have mature small trees and shrubs, while access roads have mature trees.



9. The boughs of mature trees form an archway over Chiltern Road.



10. Amenity spaces provide open space at residents' doors in the Post-war Suburban zone.



11. Meadow Way in the Post-war Suburban zone; hedges and verges enhance an otherwise bare streetscape.



12. Open plan front gardens with small shrubs and the occasional tree (Post-war Suburban zone).

MAKING CONNECTIONS LAND USE

Town Centre zone

The Town Centre zone accommodates a mix of uses, located in different clusters around the zone. Retail in Hitchin is dominated by small and independent retailers, with a few multiple retailers. These are located in Market Place, High Street, the southern half of Bancroft and western half of Hermitage Road. The market, housed in permanent stalls, is situated to the south of Church Yard. While ground level should accommodate retail, residential uses in upper floors can contribute to the vibrancy of the town centre and should be encouraged. Hitchin's balance of independent retailers and multiples, along with its strong market, makes it one of the strongest comparison shopping locations in the district in terms of quality and range.

Financial services are largely clustered in Sun Street, Bucklersbury, Brand Street, Churchgate and Churchyard Walk as well as the northern portion of Bancroft and the eastern half of Hermitage Road, along with restaurants. Residential use is found across the zone in the first floors of buildings, but particularly in Hermitage Road, Market Place and High street along with Queen Street and Tilehouse Street.

The location of the North Hertfordshire College, creates pedestrian circulation challenges and reduces the impact the college could have on the vibrancy of the town centre.

Historic High Density zone

Other than residential, there are a few shops and pubs in this zone.



1. The Town Centre zone houses local retailers plus a small number of multiple retailers.



2. Ground floor retail with residential uses above in Hermitage Road.

KEY ISSUES MC1: LAND USE

MCIA

Hitchin town centre contains a range of local retailers, a few multiple retailers and a strong market.

MCIB

The outlying zones contain two clusters of local shops, but demand in these areas is low.

MCIC

The Employment Area draws industrial traffic through residential zones lying to the south of it.

MCID

Residential uses should be encouraged in upper floors of the Town Centre Zone to create strong town centre living. Lower floors should offer retail, as an important part of street life.

MCIE

The location of the North Hertfordshire College creates pedestrian flow issues for those travelling between the college and the town centre.



3. A local shop along Strathmore Avenue in the Pre-war/Interwar Semi-detached zone serves an important local function.



4. Local shops on Redhill Road (Post-war Suburban zone).

MAKING CONNECTIONS LAND USE

Pre-war/Inter-war Semi-detached zone

There are a few local shops along Redhill road and Strathmore Avenue. Vacancies suggests low demand for retail in this zone.

Post-war Suburban zone

A neighbourhood shopping centre on Nine-springs Way offers convenience goods and plus a few local comparison retailers.

Land Use - Employment Area

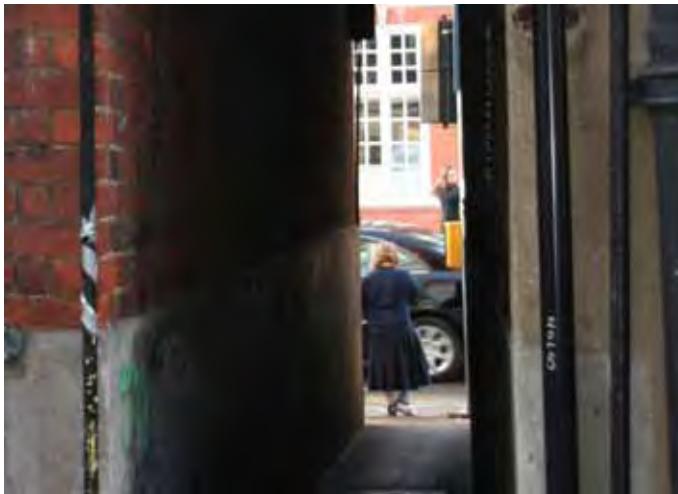
The Employment Area is located at the northern end of Hitchin. The railway acts as an edge containing the majority of it between its Peterborough and Cambridge branches, plus a small section to the west of the Peterborough branch. The smaller section covers a sewage works along with some light industry, while the larger section contains light industrial uses and warehouses.

While the Employment Area is contained well by the railway, it is not well connected to distributor roads in Hitchin. The most commonly used route into the site is from the A505 via Woolgrove Road, through some sections of the Post-war Suburban and Pre-war/Inter-war Semi-detached zones. The presence of industrial traffic in these areas was raised as an issue by several residents during the consultation workshop.

MAKING CONNECTIONS CIRCULATION, DEMAND AND LINKAGES

Town Centre zone

Hitchin's historic street layout is very permeable to pedestrians and a popular area for travel on foot; vehicle presence in Town Centre zone is reduced, leaving generous space for pedestrian movement in the historic high streets and back streets. Bancroft and Hermitage Road, the main vehicular routes in the Town Centre zone, are wide enough to accommodate pedestrians and motorists comfortably. Congestion on the main traffic routes to the west of the zone is a problem. Paynes Park was cited as a barrier by several groups during the consultation event. While keeping traffic out of the centre, this road is nearly always congested, frustrating motorists. The Bedford Road/Old Park Road triangle, set up as a one-way system, isolates some of Hitchin's key public amenities from the town centre.



1. Pedestrian permeability is a strong feature of the Town Centre.



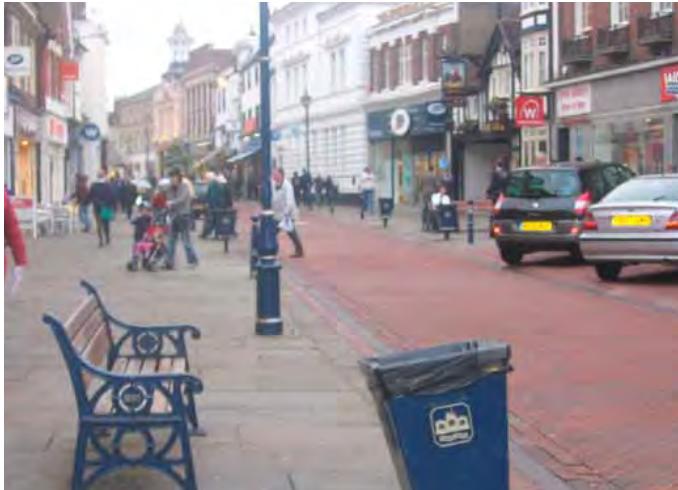
2. Bancroft is a thoroughfare for pedestrians and motorists, but successfully accommodates both.

Historic High Density zone

Movement within the Victorian and Edwardian areas to the north of the historic town centre is fairly easy for pedestrians, with straight and easily legible routes. Streets are long, however, and the zone, as a whole, is therefore not as permeable as the Town Centre zone. Vehicular linkages, likewise, are easily navigable, but the zone often experiences high traffic flow due to its proximity to the town centre and narrow streets restricting flow.

Inter-war/Pre-war Semis zone

Street patterns within this zone are mostly formal and inter-linked, making through-flow easy for pedestrians



3. Partial pedestrianisation of the town centre reduces traffic flow and makes it a very pleasant environment for pedestrians.



4. Long straight roads are easily navigable to pedestrians and motorists, and narrow streets often experience high traffic flow due to their proximity to the centre.

KEY ISSUES

MC2: CIRCULATION DEMAND AND LINKAGES

MC2A

Hitchin is a permeable settlement, with an organic town centre and good pedestrian links through the outer zones. Cycling could be promoted more strongly, with marked cycle routes along main roads, and signed cycle ways utilising current pedestrian routes.

MC2C

Congestion acts as a barrier to both pedestrians and motorists in Parkway, and at railway crossing points.

MC2D

Hitchin's permeable layout is a strong feature of the town. Cul-de-sacs detract from this permeability by frustrating pedestrian vehicular movements.

MAKING CONNECTIONS CIRCULATION, DEMAND AND LINKAGES

and motorists. The zone is well-served by Hitchin's pedestrian network, and pedestrian routes noted at the consultation event revealed sections of this zone lying to the west of the town centre to be a popular route from the centre to the countryside paths to the west of Hitchin.

Low Density Mixed Residential zone

Victorian, Edwardian and Inter-war developments around The Avenue, Highbury Road and Wymondley Road are built along straight streets, or right-angled loops which helps traffic flow through them. Located near the edge of the town centre and the open land surrounding it, this section of the Low Density Mixed Residential zone is popular with pedestrians, and supported by Hitchin's excellent pedestrian network.

Post-war Suburban zone

The extensive Post-war Suburban zone contains a range of development types. In some areas cul-de-sacs create impermeable neighbourhoods to both vehicles and pedestrians, for example, east of St Michaels Road. Other areas, in contrast, are more formally structured, consisting of longer, straighter roads.



5. Gaping Lane in the Pre-war/Inter-war Semi-detached zone; a popular route from the Town Centre zone through to the outskirts of Hitchin.



6. An alleyway in the Low Density Mixed Residential Zone connects the Town Centre with the east of the settlement via Windmill Hill.



7. Cul-de-sacs in the Post-war Suburban zone to the south-east of the railway are the exception in an otherwise permeable settlement.



8. Footpaths are abundant at the edges of the settlement.

MAKING CONNECTIONS PARKING

Town Centre zone

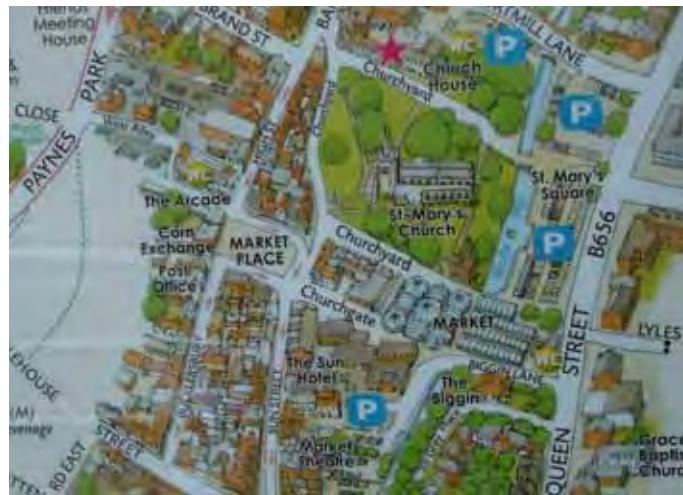
Parking provision within the Town Centre zone is adequate, with over ten public or private car parks, including large ones at St Mary's Square and south of Portmill Lane. However, car parks across the zone do reach capacity on market days; a study by ARUP in 2002 found that inadequate signage and perceived safety problems cause visitors to look for parking in the immediate shopping area, rather than the periphery of the zone. The study recommends a number of measures to tackle this, including the introduction of a parking zoning system, tariff changes and upgrades to promote the use of existing car parks, and extensions to the residents parking permits system.

Historic High Density zone

Victorian Terraces and Edwardian Villas in this zone have little/no space for off-street car parking. As a result, narrow roads are often fairly congested with on-street parking. There is a shared parking area on Baliol Road.

Pre-war/Inter-war Semi-detached zone

Many houses in this zone have large front gardens incorporating off-street parking – either to the front of the building, or to the side of semi-detached properties. Earlier housing utilises on-street parking, but streets are often wider than those of Victorian developments, reducing the potential for congestion. Cambridge Road, for example, has both on-street and off-street parking, while at Walsworth Road, High Dane and Tristram Avenue, parking is on-street. The Crescent has a shared parking



1. There are several car parks in the Town Centre zone, but they often reach capacity on Market days.



2. One of several short-stay car parks outside of the town centre.

KEY ISSUES MC3: PARKING

MC3A

There is adequate parking in the Town Centre zone, although car parks in the immediate centre are often full, while those further out are under-used. Car parking along the River Hiz impedes what could be a significant public realm space.

MC3B

On street parking can constrict narrow streets in the Historic High Density zone, and among Edwardian and Victorian developments.

MC3C

In the Post-war Suburban zone some developments have narrow streets which result in parking on pavements.

MC3D

Paving of front gardens for parking should be discouraged as front gardens are valuable street enhancements and sources of stormwater absorption.



3. On-street parking causes congestion in the narrow streets of the Historic High Density zone.



4. Off-street and on-street parking in Strathmore Avenue.

MAKING CONNECTIONS PARKING

area.

Low Density Mixed Residential zone

Most of the developments in this zone have off-street parking in large front gardens or around the sides of houses, as well as on-street parking, sometimes on relatively narrow roads.

Post-war Suburban zone

Off-street parking is standard in housing developments across the Post-war Suburban zone, many properties incorporating garages and streets are often wide. Blocks of flats have shared parking areas.



5. Extensive on-street parking in The Avenue results in parking on pavements..



6. On-street parking in The Chilterns (Low Density Mixed Residential zone).



7. Generous on-street and off-street parking afforded by low-density post-war development.



8. Generous off-street parking in a recent development in the Post-war Suburban zone, at the expense of green front gardens ..

QUALITY OF THE PUBLIC REALM STREETSCAPE ELEMENTS

Town Centre zone

Streetscape elements in the Town Centre zone tend to be sensitive to the historic fabric of the zone; bollards and street lamps are painted blue, and the latter are of an appropriate design. The cobbled surface of Market Square adds much to the overall character of this important space. Shop signs often use historic styles to respect the buildings they relate to, although there are some exceptions, and shop fronts do not always complement the buildings which accommodate them; modern shopfronts are not original to their buildings, and are sometimes designed with inappropriate materials.



1. The midnight blue and gold livery of bollards and cobbling sit well with the high quality of the historic architecture in Market Place.



2. Planting in small front gardens adds colour and interest in the Historic High Density zone.

Historic High Density zone

Front gardens comprise much of the streetscape interest in Victorian and Edwardian Streets. Mature trees are relatively uncommon in the zone because of the narrow streets. Lancaster Road and Lancaster Avenue are exceptions.

Inter-war/Pre-war Semi-detached zone

Inter-war houses tend to have low boundary walls, benefiting where there are well-kept front gardens. Developments often incorporate wide streets which can accommodate grass verges and mature trees. Amenity greens, although not planted, offset the hard landscaping which characterises other areas of the zone.

Low Density Mixed Residential zone

Low boundary walls and mature planting greatly contribute to the character of several streets in this zone,

KEY ISSUES QPRI: STREETSCAPE ELEMENTS

QPRI A

Streetscape elements in the Town Centre zone match the quality of the historic architecture there.

QPRI B

Planting, both public and private, greatly contributes to the differing characters of neighbourhoods in the outlying zones.



3. Mature planting in the Pre-war/Inter-war Semi-detached zone creates a woodland feel in Pirton Road.



4. Greenery in the outer zones creates a smooth landscape transition between Town Centre, suburb and countryside.

QUALITY OF THE PUBLIC REALM STREETSCAPE ELEMENTS

particularly in The Avenue and Chiltern Road where tall trees create a distinctive neighbourhood identity and give the area a rural feel. Thick grass and hedging in The Chilterns provide a contrast, retaining the rural character, but combined with a feeling of openness.

Post-war Suburban zone

Open plan front gardens typical of the zone add colour and vibrancy to the streetscape in many areas, with plants and shrubs visible to the public. However, where planting isn't extensive, the street scene can appear quite bare, particularly as trees do not often feature.



5. Tall trees create a wooded character in the Low Density Mixed Residential zone.



6. Planting around the shops on Ninesprings Way has potential, but needs to be well-maintained.



7. Open plan front gardens add to the streetscape in this zone, but the streetscape can appear bare where planting has not been encouraged.



8. Contemporary developments often have open plan lawns with some planting. Shrubs and hedges have not yet grown to their full potential.

QUALITY OF THE PUBLIC REALM SECURITY

Town Centre zone

The Hitchin Town Centre Strategy acknowledges an increasing number of night-time activities resulting in anti-social behaviour and suggests a number of measures to tackle this; limits to further food, drink and leisure proposals and the investigation into the possibility of alcohol-free public areas. Provision of CCTV in the Town Centre zone is good, but there are also concerns regarding security risks posed by dark alleyways around Market Place, and between Churchyard and St Mary's Square car park.



1. Inactive frontages create security risks in the town centre, despite use of CCTV.

Historic High Density zone

The density of this zone equates to a high level of surveillance, and low front boundaries allow residents to look directly onto the street. The lack of off-street or garaged parking increases the risk of theft or damage to cars.



2. Bay windows and high densities increase the level of surveillance up and down the street in the Historic High Density zone. This is reduced by high hedging.

Inter/Pre-war Semi-detached zone

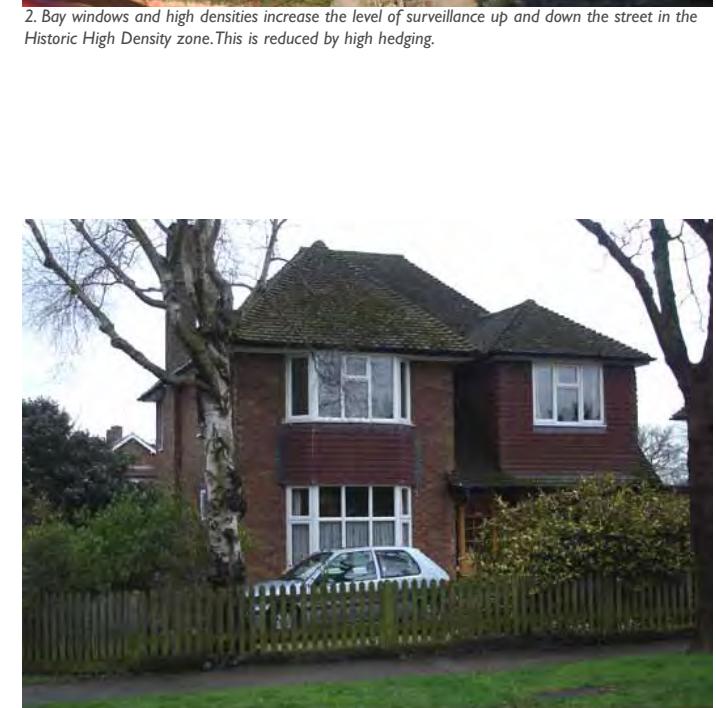
Some areas of this zone are popular with pedestrians travelling from the centre to the countryside routes around Hitchin, enhancing surveillance by the public. Differing front gardens make for differing levels of street security; some are open plan, some have low boundaries, others have high, dense hedges.

Low Density Mixed Residential zone

Surveillance within this zone can be obscured by high hedges, shrubs and trees. However, connectivity throughout the zone is high, and streets are popular with pedes-



3. Different garden styles allow for different levels of surveillance in the Pre-war/Inter-war Semi-detached zone.



4. Surveillance in the Low Density Mixed Residential zone varies depending on the extent to which hedging obscures sight onto the street.

KEY ISSUES QPR2: SECURITY

QPR2A

The Town Centre zone experiences anti-social behaviour, despite good CCTV coverage.

QPR2B

Variations across the outer zones result from varying levels of planting.

QPR2C

Security in alleyways in the town centre zone and across the settlement can be enhanced with good lighting.

QUALITY OF THE PUBLIC REALM SECURITY

trians travelling to and from the town centre. The Victorian and Edwardian areas of the zone comprise relatively high densities, enhancing surveillance.

Post-war Suburban zone

Lower densities in this zone reduce surveillance levels and some streets are fronted by blank timber fences. Gardens are mostly open plan, and streets are wide and open, creating good visibility along streets. Informal street layouts and cul-de-sacs can discourage pedestrian movement through some areas of the zone.

Higher densities and open plan gardens create high levels of natural surveillance in recent developments.

Pedestrian footpaths throughout Hitchin vary in terms of security. Although most are very popular and well-used, the consultation event revealed strong concerns among residents for safety in narrow and dark alleyways, particularly those bordered by blank timber fences making surveillance impossible.



5. A timber fence fronts the street in the Post-war Suburban zone.



6. Open plan front gardens, wide windows and high densities make for a secure neighbourhood.



7. Alleyways provide excellent pedestrian routes through Hitchin, but can be perceived to be dangerous, when confined by high blank fences.



8. A smaller sense of enclosure makes for a more open and safer feel in a path in the Post-war Suburban zone.

SETTLEMENT-WIDE CRITERIA CIRCULATION

Pedestrian Routes

A dense network of alleyways permeate the town, providing pedestrians and cyclists with car-free, direct routes and the permeability of the historic centre outwards in a radial pattern. A path runs around the border of the settlement to the east and south, combining the openness of the countryside with the proximity of town access. Paths are well signposted and evidently well-used. However, the railway creates a barrier through Hitchin. There is only one pedestrian route across it, a narrow bridge at the end of Benslow Lane which leads to an impermeable Post-war Suburban development at Hardy Way, frustrating movement eastwards and north-eastwards. Access to the station from the east would be useful, particularly given the narrow pavements under the railway bridge. The location of North Hertfordshire College creates challenges for pedestrian links between it and the town centre.

Vehicular Routes

Motorists approach Hitchin from Luton via the A505 and Offley Road, following Fishpond Road, Nightingale Road and Cambridge Road towards Letchworth and the A1. From the south, the A602 leads up from Stevenage, joining the A600 running north towards Bedford and the A1. Traffic flow through Hitchin has been recognised as an issue by the local authority, with main access roads heavily used by through traffic travelling from Luton to the A1, and up to Bedford from Stevenage, creating a large barrier to pedestrians intersecting the western and northern sides of the settlement.

SETTLEMENT-WIDE CRITERIA SWCI: CIRCULATION

SWC1A

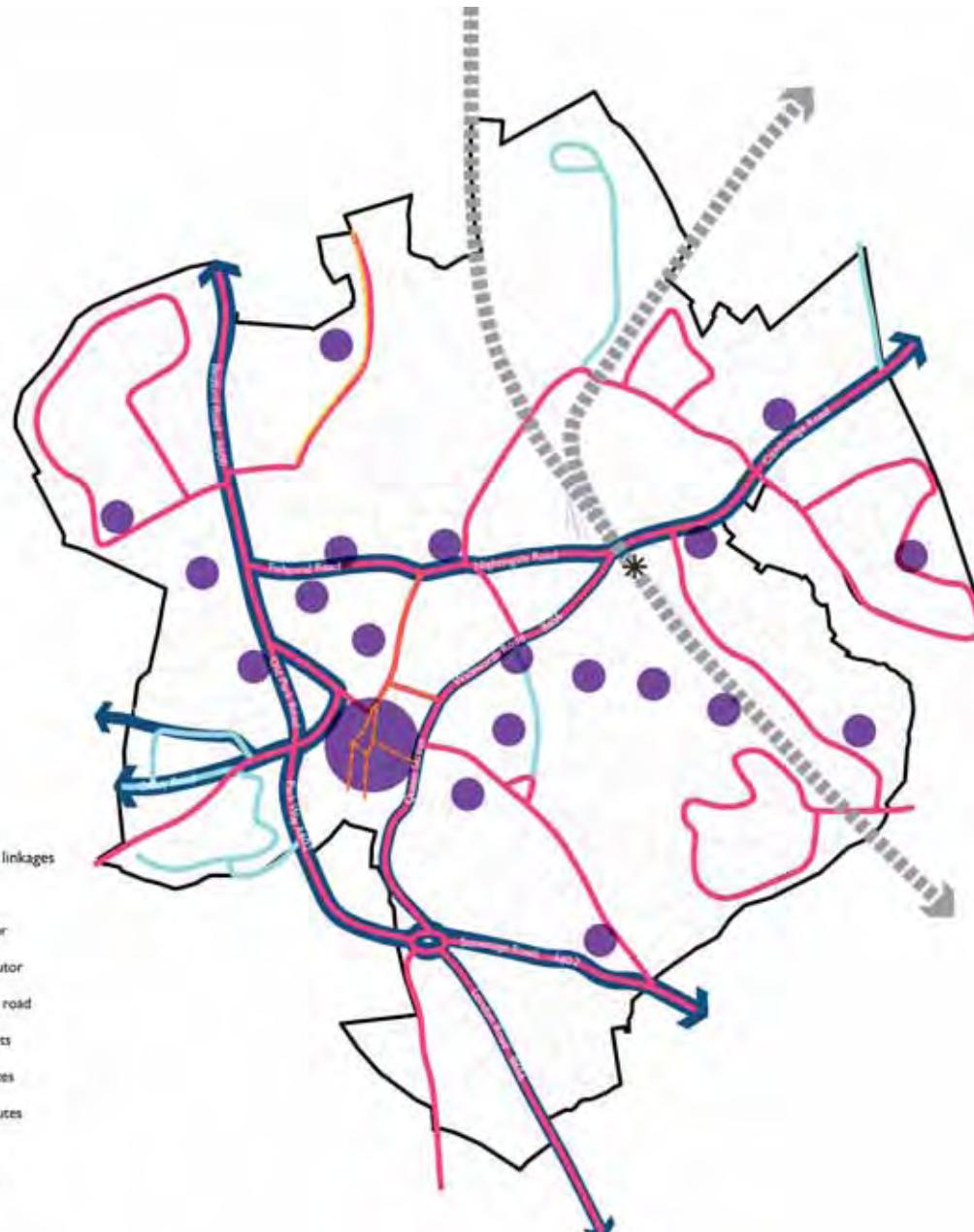
Hitchin's pedestrian network is one of the town's main assets, encouraging permeability and flow between the centre and the surrounding countryside via clear radial routes. Cycling access could be improved in this regard.

SWC1B

Traffic travelling through Hitchin between surrounding centres such as Luton and the A1 creates congestion problems within the town.

SWC1C

Access to the station from both sides of the railway line would ease pedestrian and traffic flow to this important node.



I. The main circulation routes around Hitchin.

SETTLEMENT-WIDE CRITERIA

VIEWS

Viewpoints are a strong feature in Hitchin, thanks to the town's position on the northern side of the Chiltern Hills. The ridge running north/south on the western edge of the settlement provides excellent views both across the town and out into the countryside, as does the higher ground either side of the River Purwell. Windmill Hill is a favourite viewpoint, offering views directly over the historic town centre. Within the town centre itself, views along the historic frontages are favoured: Tilehouse Street, High Street/Bancroft and Sun Street/Church Yard. The view of the church from Queen Street is also a favourite. Several key gateways have been noted by the Town Centre Strategy: the Park Street Triangle, Windmill Hill/Walsworth Road, Park Way and Bedford Road/Old Park Road. The only gateway marked as a view during the consultation event was the approach from Cambridge Road, possibly because the ridge at the southeastern edge of the settlement obstructs views from outside the settlement into the centre.



1. Tilehouse Street offers a view corridor down to Bridge Street, bordered by a high quality historic streetscape.



2. Views out of Hitchin from the ridge bordering the settlement to the north-west.

KEY ISSUES LEI: VIEWS

SWC2A

Hitchin's topography creates excellent views both into the town and out into the countryside.

SWC2B

The combination of an undulating topography and consistent building heights provides strong views which reveal an organic connection between the terrain and the built environment.



3. Gateways did not feature as views in the consultation event - Hitchin's topography does not allow for vistas into the town from some of its principal gateways.



4. Windmill Hill provides one of the most important views of Hitchin, providing residents with a panorama of the Town Centre.

SETTLEMENT-WIDE CRITERIA LEGIBILITY

Landmarks, gateways and orientation points

Orientation within Hitchin town centre is relatively easy thanks to the strong north/south axis provided by Bancroft, anchored by a large node, Market Place. The church is a key landmark from the north-east, and visible from the east from Windmill Hill. The route for pedestrians and cyclists into the centre from the station is very legible, with a well-signed route and a main road – Walsworth Road – leading directly onto Queen Street. Vehicular gateways into Hitchin are marked with brown signs marking sites of historic interest, but several of them, particularly entries from the south, start at the bottom of a slope which does not give rise to vistas into town. The local authority has also suggested the improvement of two specific gateways; the route leading from Walsworth Road down Queen Street to Park Street could be enhanced with cycle lanes, improved street frontages and planting along Queen Street, and at The Park Way improvements could be aimed at easing congestion and improving pedestrian access across the road. The station is a key gateway into Hitchin to an increasing number of passengers, including commuters.

Paths and edges

Vehicular paths tend to follow the main radial routes in and out of Hitchin, as well as an orbital route running along Park Road, Fishpond Road, Highbury Road, and St John's Road. Pedestrian paths within Hitchin are extensive, both within the town centre which is partially pedestrianised, and among the outlying zones where there is a radial pattern of pedestrian alleyways leading



1. Bancroft, a historic path into Hitchin, remains a key north/south axis and orientation point in Hitchin.



2. Market Place, the main pedestrian node in Hitchin, acts as an anchor point and hub for orientation throughout the town.

KEY ISSUES LE2: LEGIBILITY

SWC3A

Hitchin's historic streets provide a legible structure to the Town Centre zone as well as key pedestrian and vehicular paths.

SWC3B

Station Approach and the station forecourt is a key gateway into Hitchin for visitors and commuters.

SWC3C

The railway forms a barrier to pedestrians, cyclists and motorists.

SWC3D

Improved gateways surrounding Hitchin's historic core could enhance the legibility of the town centre to motorists, pedestrians and cyclists.



3. Signs highlighting historic landmarks demarcate the gateways into Hitchin.



4. The station is an increasingly important gateway to Hitchin, and an improvement to Station Approach could have a large impact on visitor and resident perceptions of Hitchin.

SETTLEMENT-WIDE CRITERIA LEGIBILITY

out of the settlement. The River Hiz is an obvious but underutilised path, running north/south through the centre of the town, and with the potential to create a strong pedestrian and cycle link between the town centre and outlying zones. Cycling was not registered as a common form of transport by those who attended the consultation process, but the few cycle routes that were noted followed the main vehicle routes forming a ring around the town centre. The split in the railway north of the station provides a pair of edges which contain and separate the majority of the Employment Area from the rest of Hitchin.

Barriers

During the consultation process, a number of barriers were commonly noted by residents. The railway underpass to the north of Hitchin Station was considered a barrier to movement on an important route between the town centre and the north-east of Hitchin, and on the main route out of Hitchin to the A1, Letchworth and Cambridge. As a result, many groups marked a route making an extensive detour from the centre to Cambridge Road via the Wymondley road underpass. The railway was also considered a barrier by pedestrians, with only three crossings, one Cambridge Road, where there is only one pavement, a second at Wymondley Road, a kilometre to the south, but lacking a direct link with the station, and a third at Wymondley Road. Park Way and the Payne's Park one-way system were noted many times as being congested to motorists. This creates a wall of traffic to pedestrian and cyclist



Hitchin is laced with a network of pedestrian paths, making the town very navigable and permeable to this mode of transport.



6. The footbridge over the railway is one of only three ways across the railway which forms a barrier right through the western side of Hitchin.



7. Congested roads create barriers to key services such as the library.



8. Despite evidence of commuter cycling in Hitchin, it was not identified as a common form of transport at the consultation workshop.

SETTLEMENT-WIDE CRITERIA LEGIBILITY

flow between the town centre and the southeast of Hitchin, isolating some important community facilities in the process: the library, the museum, a supermarket and a multi-storey car park.

Image

Hitchin's image is dominated by the historic streets of the Town Centre zone which identify Hitchin as a sizeable and historically prosperous market town. The Church, is a distinctive landmark in the town centre, as is Market Place. Resident workshop responses revealed Hitchin's image to incorporate Hitchin's relationship with the countryside. This has been important historically, in terms of the wool trade, corn and maltings industries, and continues to be so in terms of leisure and the strong pedestrian links enjoyed by residents for walking.

Signage

Signage makes navigation easy, both along the main through-routes around Hitchin and the smaller network of pedestrian and cycle routes throughout the outer zones. Parking signage has been noted as an issue by the local authority, as motorists have been found to be looking for on-street parking in the immediate centre, rather than using the ample provision in designated parking areas.



9. Hitchin's relationship with the countryside, physically embodied in its pedestrian paths, forms one of its main assets and an important part of the town's identity and image.



10. The turreted red-brick and stone tower of the church is a distinctive local landmark.



11. Hitchin's image and identity as a large and prosperous historic market town encapsulated in the timberframe houses around the Market Place.



12. Footpath signage in the outer zones aids pedestrian movement through the dense network of paths which permeate the settlement.

KEY ISSUES, SAFEGUARDS, AND OPPORTUNITIES

	Criteria	Issue Number	Issue	Safeguards	Opportunities
MAKING PLACES	MPI: Building Types	MP1A	Streets in the Town Centre zone are dominated by continuous frontages of narrow buildings, with later developments across several plots, including some larger post-war developments.	Protect existing historic houses and civic buildings. New development should build to existing scales and reflect existing typologies	Redevelop buildings which are out of character with the historic fabric of the Town Centre zone, including the Churchgate Shopping Centre.
		MP1B	The range of housing types in the outer zones varies much more than in the centre.		
	MP2: Materials / Architectural Styles	MP2A	The Town Centre zone contains a range of attractive historic styles, including some grand buildings in Market Place.	Preserve and maintain historic buildings.	Use historic styles and materials as a starting point for contemporary designs in the zone.
		MP2B	A number of post-war buildings in the Town Centre zone do not respect the historic fabric.		Seek opportunities for redevelopment of buildings which are out of character with the historic fabric of the zone.
	MP3: Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas	MP3A	The Conservation Area protects Hitchin's medieval street pattern and a number of historically significant buildings.	Preserve the medieval plots and town layout in Hitchin.	
		MP3B	The Conservation Area extends beyond the town centre to incorporate a number of fine Victorian and Edwardian Villas around Highbury Road.	New infill in these areas should be sensitive to Victorian and Edwardian architecture. The streetscape should be kept well.	
		MP3C	Signage, street furniture and paving matches the quality of the historic architecture. However, too much signage can give the Town Centre a cluttered appearance.	Maintain quality of street furniture, signage and paving.	
	MP4: Building Heights	MP4A	The massing of the Churchgate Shopping Centre dominates Market Place		Seek opportunities for redevelopment of this site.
		MP4B	Building heights show subtle variation in all zones, enhancing streets where building lines are strong, and providing interesting and lively roovescapes.	Retain even building heights where possible throughout the settlement.	
		MP4C	Blocks of flats in the Low Density Mixed Residential, and Post-war Suburban zones are not in keeping with their two-storey surroundings.		Rebuild to lower heights when the opportunity arises.
	MP5: Topography	MP5A	Hitchin's topography is an important feature of Hitchin's character, forming undulating neighbourhoods and excellent views throughout the town.	Consider the impact of tall buildings on sightlines and views around Hitchin.	

KEY ISSUES, SAFEGUARDS, AND OPPORTUNITIES

	Criteria	Issue Number	Issue	Safeguards	Opportunities
CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE	CE1: Town Morphology	CEIA	Hitchin has a strong urban structure, with developments located in roughly concentric circles, with dense town centre fabric, open land, Victorian perimeter blocks, pre-war/intervar long permeable streets, and, finally, the peripheral curvilinear streets or cul-de-sac areas.	Retain neighbourhood distinctiveness by building to existing scale and density.	
		CEIB	The Town Centre zone is very permeable to pedestrians, an asset which has been carried across into the outer zones.		
	CE2: Building Lines, Setbacks and Gaps	CE2A	The historic plots in the Town Centre zone give it very strong building lines, particularly on Hermitage Road, where a single style and choice of building materials is employed.	Protect and adhere to plot sizes and densities within the Town Centre zone.	
		CE2B	Building lines are relatively strong among Victorian, pre-war and some contemporary developments, with terracing or regular gaps.	Encourage strong building lines in new developments in these zones.	
		CE2C	Weak building lines are found in the Post-war Suburban and Low Density Mixed Residential zone, formed by block-level housing gaps and low density cul-de-sacs.		
		CE3C	High hedging creates blank frontages in the Low Density Mixed Residential and Post-war Suburban zones.		
		CE3D	Houses facing cul-de-sacs leave blank frontage to their access roads.		Avoid cul-de-sac development in new build.
	CE3: Building Orientation	CE3A	Unique buildings in the Town Centre zone create interesting elevations and a very vibrant street frontage.		
		CE3B	Active frontages in the higher density areas of the outlying zones comprise a shared characteristic and link with the Town Centre zone.		Encourage active frontages and frontages facing the street in new infill.
	CE4: Pavements	CE4A	Pavements in the Town Centre zone are of a high quality in the main access streets, but this increases a sense of neglect in some of the back streets in the zone.		
		CE4B	Pavements in the Historic High Density zone and some areas of the Low Density Mixed Residential zone are too narrow, often dominated by parked cars.		
		CE4C	Areas in the Low Density Mixed Residential zone have no pavements		
		CE4D	Pavement parking, common in newer developments, restricts pedestrian flow.		Build streets wide enough to accommodate on-street parking without restricting traffic flow.

KEY ISSUES, SAFEGUARDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

	Criteria	Issue Number	Issue	Safeguards	Opportunities
CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE	CE5: Open Land	CE5A	Hitchin is well endowed with a range of open spaces catering for sports, walking, and children's play areas.	Enhance and protect open spaces in Hitchin.	
		CE5B	Hitchin's pedestrian connections into the countryside are an important feature of Hitchin.	Protect and maintain Hitchin's extensive pedestrian network.	
		CE5C	The area around St Mary's Church is dominated by the car park and market stalls and is an opportunity for public realm improvements. There is a significant opportunity for a riverside walk.		The car park is an opportunity for public realm improvements. There is a significant opportunity for a riverside walk.
		CE5D	Some streets in the Post-war Suburban zone appear bare where wide streets do not accommodate planting beyond plain grass verges.		Plant trees and verges in overly hard or bare streetscapes in the Postwar Suburban zone.
		CE5E	The open spaces adjacent to the town centre serve as important transition zones between surrounding residential areas and the town centre.	Protect and enhance open spaces surrounding the town centre.	
MAKING CONNECTIONS	MC1: Land Use	MC1A	Hitchin town centre contains a range of local retailers, a few multiples and a strong market.		Promote Hitchin's market as a selling point to visitors.
		MC1B	The outlying zones contain two clusters of local shops, but demand in these areas is low.		
		MC1C	The Employment Area draws industrial traffic through residential zones lying to the south of it.		Investigate opportunities for a new access route to the employment area which by-passes residential areas.
		MC1D	Residential uses should be encouraged in upper floors of the Town Centre Zone to create strong town centre living. Lower floors should offer retail, as an important part of street life.		
		MC1E	The location of the North Hertfordshire College creates pedestrian flow issues for those travelling between the college and the town centre.		
	MC2: Circulation Demand and Linkages	MC2A	Hitchin is a permeable settlement, with an organic town centre and good pedestrian links through the outer zones. Cycling could be promoted more strongly, with marked cycle routes along main roads, and signed cycle ways utilising current pedestrian routes.	Enhance and protect links between Hitchin's pedestrian friendly core and the outskirts to encourage pedestrian flow throughout the settlement.	
		MC2B	Congestion acts as a barrier to both pedestrians and motorists in Parkway, and at railway crossing points.		Seek opportunities to provide additional railway crossing points, particularly for pedestrians. Consider settlement-wide strategies to tackle congestion.
		MC2C	Hitchin's permeable layout is a strong feature of the town. Cul-de-sacs detract from this considerably, and are a noticeable for the challenges they cause.		Avoid cul-de-sac development.

KEY ISSUES, SAFEGUARDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

	Criteria	Issue Number	Issue	Safeguards	Opportunities
MAKING CONNECTIONS	MC3: Parking	MC3A	There is adequate parking in the Town Centre zone, although car parks in the immediate centre are often full, while those further out are under-used. Car parking along the River Hiz impedes what could be a significant public realm space.		Consider ways of reducing traffic to the Market without damaging it; freeing up parking space for public realm improvements.
		MC3B	On street parking can constrict narrow streets in the Historic High Density zone, and among Edwardian and Victorian developments.		Consider ways of reducing traffic flow through narrow Victorian streets, and finding communal parking areas to remove cars from the street.
		MC3C	In the Post-war Suburban zone some developments have narrow streets which result in parking on pavements.		
		MC3D	Paving of front gardens for parking should be discouraged as front gardens are valuable street enhancements and sources of stormwater absorption.		
QUALITY OF THE PUBLIC REALM	QPRI: Streetscape Elements	QPRIA	Streetscape elements in the Town Centre zone match the quality of the historic architecture there.	Maintain the high standard of street furniture design employed in the centre.	
		QPRIB	Planting, both public and private, greatly contributes to the differing characters of neighbourhoods in the outlying zones.	Protect and enhance planting throughout Hitchin.	
	QPR2: Security	QPR2A	The Town Centre zone experiences anti-social behaviour, despite good CCTV coverage.		
		QPR2B	Variations across the outer zones result from varying levels of planting.		Build active frontages and, where suitable, higher densities.
		QPR2C	Security in alleyways in the town centre zone and across the settlement can be enhanced with good lighting.		Improve lighting in dark alleyways and those without surveillance.

KEY ISSUES, SAFEGUARDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

	Criteria	Issue Number	Issue	Safeguards	Opportunities
LEGIBILITY	SWC1: Circulation	SWC1A	Hitchin's pedestrian network is one of the town's main assets, encouraging permeability and flow between the centre and the surrounding countryside via clear radial routes. Cycling access could be improved in this regard.	Protect Hitchin's pedestrian network, and enhance those which residents consider a security threat as a result of narrowness or darkness.	
		SWC1B	Traffic travelling through Hitchin between surrounding centres such as Luton and the A1 creates congestion problems within the town.		
		SWC1C	Access to the station from both sides of the railway line would ease pedestrian and traffic flow to this important node.		Investigate opportunities for a second access point to the station from the east of the settlement.
	SWC2: Views	SWC2A	Hitchin's topography creates excellent views both into the town and out into the countryside.	Protect views across and out of Hitchin.	
		SWC2B	The combination of an undulating topography and consistent building heights provides strong views which reveal an organic connection between the terrain and the built environment.	Protect Hitchin's building heights and skyline.	
	SWC3: Legibility	SWC3A	Hitchin's historic streets provide a legible structure to the Town Centre zone as well as key pedestrian and vehicular paths.	Ensure that key landmarks such as the church remain dominant within the streetscape.	
		SWC3B	Station approach is a key gateway into Hitchin for visitors and commuters.		Ensure that the public realm is of a high quality immediately outside the station, in order to give visitors and residents a positive image of the town.
		SWC3C	The railway forms a barrier to pedestrians, cyclists and motorists.		Seek additional crossing points along the railway.
		SWC3D	Improved gateways surrounding Hitchin's historic core could enhance the legibility of the town centre to motorists, pedestrians and cyclists.		Public realm enhancements, landmarks and signage could demarcate the gateways to the town centre.

CONSULTATION

Hitchin Workshop, 30 January 2007

The Hitchin Urban Design Assessment Day was held on Tuesday 30 January 2007 at Hitchin Town Hall.

The purpose of the event was to examine the perceptions of local people about Hitchin and to record how people perceive and use the town in their daily lives. The event was comprised of three workshop sessions, each examining a different issue in relation to Hitchin, from the character and textures that create a unique local identity, to personal perceptions of the local neighbourhood and local routes and connections.

The event was attended by 40 local stakeholders and was introduced by Helen Leitch, Urban Design Officer at North Hertfordshire District Council. Adam Lubinsky of Urban Practitioners explained the programme for the day.

The format of the day involved three workshop sessions, outlined within this consultation document.

RECORD OF ATTENDANCE The following people attended the event:

Ms Jane Arnold, Hitchin Society
Ms Sasa Arpino, Urban Practitioners
Mr Mark Barker, Barker Parry Town Planning
Mr David Bellring
Mr Bowker
Mrs Bowker
Ms Helen Brookes, Urban Practitioners
Mr Richard Butchart, Hitchin Visioning Steering Group
Ms Mary Caldwell, North Herts District Council
Mr Chris Carter, North Herts District Council
Cllr Alan Clark, North Herts District Council
Mrs Ellie Clarke, Hitchin Forum
Ms Stella Cooke
Ms Joanne Cousins, North Herts District Council
Mr Jon Davies, Hitchin Society
Mr Sella Douglas, Hitchin Historical Society
Mrs PM Douglas
Mr Brian Foreman
Ms Helen Gadd, North Herts District Council
Mr Harwood, Hitchin Transport Group
Mrs Harwood Hitchin Visioning - Young People
Mr Chris Honey
Pauline Humphries, Hitchin Historical Society
Mr Hayhurst, Court Home Limited
Ms Helen Leitch, North Herts District Council
Mr Adam Lubinsky, Urban Practitioners
Ms Mary Marshall
Mr Dan Meekins
Mr Keith Montague, Hitchin Society
Ms Anne Osborn, North Herts District Council
Mr Chris Parker
Mrs Gae Parry, Barker Parry Town Planning
Christine Phillips, North Herts District Council
Mr Brett Smith, Hitchin Town Centre Initiative
Mr Mike Stannard
Dr David Shirley
Mr Stephenson

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE URBAN DESIGN ASSESSMENT HITCHIN SEPTEMBER 2007

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE URBAN DESIGN ASSESSMENT HITCHIN

URBAN DESIGN ASSESSMENT DAY

Date Tuesday 30 January 2007
Time 12.00 noon-3.00pm
Venue Hitchin Town Hall

PROGRAMME

12.00 Registration and buffet lunch

12.20 Introduction
Helen Leitch, North Hertfordshire District Council
Adam Lubinsky, Urban Practitioners

12.30 What Surrounds Us? Neighbourhood Character and Textures

1.00 Does It Work For Us? Neighbourhood Perceptions

1.30 Where Are We Going? Routes and Connections

2.15 Tea break

2.30 Feedback

2.45 Summing Up and Next Steps

2.50 Close

NH DC urban practitioners **UP**



Adam Lubinsky explains the programme for the day.



Participants completing the worksheets in Workshop 1:What surrounds us?



A participant presents and explains the routes, barriers and paths marked out by his group.

WORKSHOP I - WHAT SURROUNDS US?

How well do you know your town? Neighbourhood character and textures

An initial 'ice breaking' exercise was undertaken in the form of a quiz based on the textures, materials and landmarks in Hitchin. Participants worked in small groups and were issued with a worksheet containing snapshots of photographs from around the town. They were asked to identify the subjects of the images and where these subjects were located. Following this, participants were asked to identify whether a series of photographs showed publicly or privately-owned areas. Finally, participants were asked to identify local features and their functions.

Of all the images, participants found the Corn Exchange the easiest to identify - 24 out of 28 responses labelled it correctly. David Greig the Grocer's, the fragmented emblem on Church House and the library mural were all identified by around two-thirds of participants. The images which caused the most difficulty were number four, located on the north side of Bancroft, and number five, the Friends Meeting House, located at the corner of Bedford Road and Payne's Park.

In the second part of the workshop, the groups were asked to identify whether particular spaces were public or private areas of the town, based on their appearance. Images B, C, D and E were all identified by around 20 participants. The remaining two caused a little more difficulty by showing a combination of public and private elements. Image A, showing a private wall in front of a public verge with private planting, was correctly described by only seven participants. Image F showed a private arcade with public access and was identified correctly by only nine participants.

The third section required the groups to identify the function of local features. The CCTV apparatus was identified by nearly everyone, but the public seating area with steps in front of it led to some confusion. While the majority recognised the public bench and its function, some saw it in terms of its use as a 'youth area'. The function of the iron plaque in image three was disputed, and led to a variety of answers and some discussion. The majority view was that it was related in some way to Victorian fire services.

How well do you know your town?

**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE URBAN DESIGN ASSESSMENT
HITCHIN**

Recognise these features?
Can you map them by their number?

Recognise these features?
Can you map them by their number?

Recognise these features?
Are they public or private?

A
B
C
D
E
F

Recognise these features?
What are their function?

1
2
3

Photo: Hertfordshire County Council

WORKSHOP 2 - DOES IT WORK FOR US?

Neighbourhood perceptions

A short presentation was given to the group by Adam Lubinsky of Urban Practitioners about why certain aspects of the built environment have evolved in a particular way. The presentation examined the relationship between the built form and streetscape of an area and the paths that people chose to move around. In addition, the relationship between building density and street form, building heights and views was also discussed within the presentation.

Following the presentation, participants were asked to identify what they liked about their town by looking at a series of photographs examining building materials, shop signs, footpaths and boundaries. Participants were asked to consider four photographs under each heading and assign each one a mark between one and five to indicate which ones they liked the most (with five representing those that were liked the most). In addition, participants were asked to write a word or phrase to describe how they felt about the image.

The following pages outline participants' responses to each of the images and the words that were selected to describe them. Beneath each image and the number scale are the total number of participants that allocated the image that particular score.

What do you like about your town?

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE URBAN DESIGN ASSESSMENT

HITCHIN

Consider the architectural elements and materials in the photographs below. Give each one a mark from 1-5, where 5 indicates those that you like most. Below each image write a key word to describe how you feel about it.
When you have completed the sheet, please return it to a member of the Urban Practitioners team.

BUILDING MATERIALS

	5	4	3	2	1

SHOP SIGNS

	5	4	3	2	1

FOOTPATHS

	5	4	3	2	1

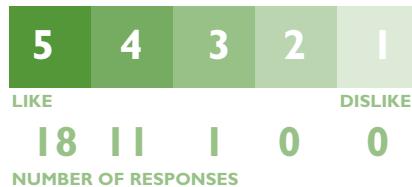
BOUNDARIES

	5	4	3	2	1

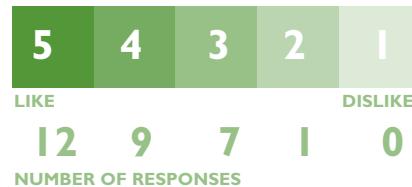
Urban Practitioners

WORKSHOP 2 - DOES IT WORK FOR US?

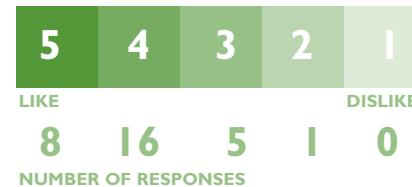
BUILDING MATERIALS



The Victorian grey and red brick architrave was popular, scoring eighteen fives, eleven fours and only one three. The brick shown in the image was considered a 'soft' and 'warm' texture, and the style 'friendly', 'attractive' and 'traditional'. The brick detailing and varied colouring made the building 'interesting' and 'decorative'.



The Victorian red brick gable with white gable decoration and decorated white window framing was quite well received, scoring twelve fives, four nines, seven threes and a two. The style overall was considered 'attractive', and many thought the white detailing very positive - 'ornate', 'intricate', 'decorative' and 'interesting'. However, some found the decoration too much, considering it 'fussy' and 'twee'.



The timberframe with plaster infill was given a four by the majority, along with eight fives, five threes and a two. Residents felt the style to be a powerful representation of history and heritage, particularly of medieval England. Some found the style dated.



The facade incorporating two shades of brick, tile cladding, pebble-dash and white wood was not generally liked, scoring eighteen twos and ten ones. Criticism focussed on two aspects; the number of different materials used, which made the building 'messy', 'muddled' and 'confusing', and the low quality of the materials used, which made the house 'ugly' and 'cheap'.

COMMENTS

Derailed	Friendly
Rich	Good x2
Pleasing x2	Mature
Attractive x3	Warm x2
Traditional x3	Elegant
Solid x3	Decorative
Simple	Lovely brickwork
Classic	Interesting x2
Historic	Composed
Soft	Variegated

COMMENTS

Attractive x3	Solid
Detailed x4	Decor
Decorative x2	Historic
Victorian	Fussy x2
Good	Victorian x2
Intricate x2	Periodic
Ornate x3	OK
Interesting x3	Twee

COMMENTS

Tudor x2	Character
Good	Picturesque
Historic x5	Oldy Worldy
Sustainable	English x2
Medieval x2	Mock
Pleasant	Dated
Heritage	Just alright
Attractive	
Old x2	

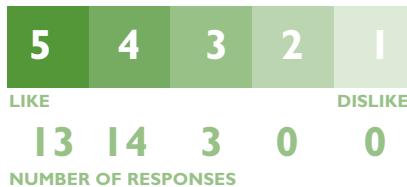
COMMENTS

Modern x3	Cluttered
Fussy	Confusing x2
Temporary	Modern
Bland	Hotch-potch
Complicated	Trashy
Muddled	Brutal
Grim	Ugly x2
Messy x3	Mismatch
Mixed	Poor
Bland	Cheap x3

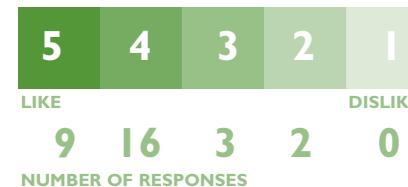
WORKSHOP 2 - DOES IT WORK FOR US?



The signage in this street provoked a negative response, scoring fifteen ones and twelve twos. Bright and conflicting colours along with differing shop frontages and heights led fifteen participants to describe the image as either 'messy' or 'cluttered'. The bright colours were a sore point, labelled 'loud', 'brash' and 'gaudy'.



The Freeman Hardy Willis sign, painted on plaster in an Art Nouveau red and green font was well liked, given thirteen fives and fourteen fours. Residents valued the style for the historic connotations it held for them, eight describing it as 'historic' and a further two as 'nostalgic'. The style was also considered abstractly beautiful, described as 'exquisite', 'attractive' (twice), 'classy' and 'arty'.



The black sign hanging from a wrought iron frame with a timberframe gable in the background was received well, reflected in a score of nine fives and sixteen fours. It was considered by many 'historic' and 'traditional', although some saw insincerity in its traditional style, describing it as 'mock' and 'twee' (both twice).



The gloss white sign with flat, stylised black lettering received a middling response. Fifteen participants gave the sign a three, with three giving it a four. The most common adjective associated with it was 'modern' (eleven). Those who gave it fours liked it for its 'clean' and 'contemporary' look, while those who disliked it - six twos and five ones - saw it as 'non-descript', a 'transplanted' style, an example of standardisation across the retail sector.

COMMENTS	
Mixed	Incoherent
Jolly	Unpleasant
Muddle	Busy
Interesting	Impertinent
Dirty	Brash
Loud x2	Bad
Gaudy	Horrible
Messy x8	Plastic
Cluttered x4	

COMMENTS	
Decorative x2	Restrained
Pretty	Beautiful
Old	Quirky
Inviting	Attractive x2
Art Nouveau	Classy
Historic x8	Period touch
Nostalgic x2	Arty
Exquisite	Ornate
Good	Classic

COMMENTS	
Quality	Old Worldly
Traditional x4	Heritage
Historic x3	Good
Lovely	Fair try
Decorative	Pleasant
Twee x2	Pretty
Cute	Mock x2
Local	OK
Comfortable	Unsympathetic
Classic	

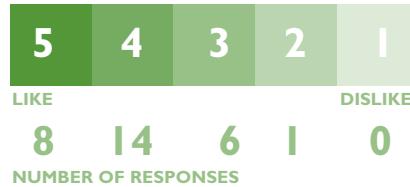
COMMENTS	
Clean design x2	Nothingness
Modern x11	Jarring
Contemporary	Trendy
Appropriate	Non-descript x2
Acceptable	Transplant
Minimalist	Intrusive
Youth	

WORKSHOP 2 - DOES IT WORK FOR US?

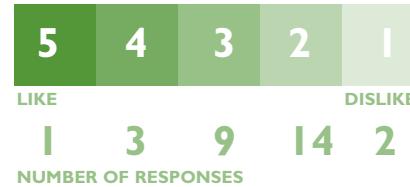
FOOTPATHS



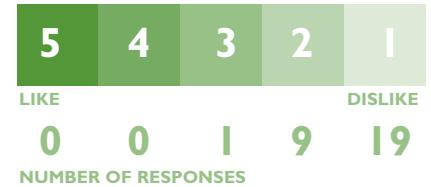
The red metal 1990s covered passageway was given three fours, fourteen threes, eight twos and five ones. Positive respondents valued the simple modern style and appreciated the passage as 'practical' and 'functional'. Equally, however, its style was considered an 'eyesore', 'bleak' and garish. A few disliked the alley because of the anti-social uses it attracted which made it 'unsafe', 'smelly' and occupied by homeless people.



The bush-lined path leading around the back of houses was rated highly, getting eight fives and fourteen fours, six threes. Although many described the path positively with words such as 'welcoming' and 'pleasant', the qualities most valued in the path were its 'rural', 'natural' and 'open' character. The path scored one two, considered by this participant 'untidy'.



The narrow tarmac alleyway with brick house wall to the left and wooden low wooden fencing with hedging to the right received a cool response. With fourteen twos, nine threes and two ones, the main complaints involved a concern for safety. The sense of enclosure caused by the narrowness of the alley and the darkness brought about by overhanging foliage made the route 'uninviting', 'cramped', 'threatening' and 'unsafe' (four times). Otherwise, the alley was considered too plain - 'unimaginative' and 'bleak'.



The graffitied concrete bridge with white metal railings received a very low score: nineteen ones and nine twos. The bridge's plain and functional design and the use of metal and concrete gave rise to descriptions such as 'brutal', 'bleak' and 'ugly'. Together with feelings of neglect caused by the graffiti, the bridge was described as 'unsafe' five times, as well as 'anti-pedestrian' and simply 'unusable'.

COMMENTS	
Acceptable x2	Bland
Protective	Garish
Purposeful	Dingy
Practical	Unattractive x2
Safe	Forbidding
Functional x4	Bleak x2
Convenient	Intimidating
Modern x2	Hateful
Could be worse	Unsafe, smelly
Sheltering x2	Homeless people

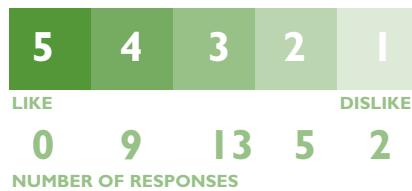
COMMENTS	
Open x3	Good
Welcoming x2	Healthy
Pleasant x3	Vert
Natural x3	Inviting
Pretty	Good planting
Rural x8	Rustic
Attractive	Untidy
Enticing	

COMMENTS	
Pedestrian	Unfriendly x2
Urban x2	Uninviting x2
Victorian	Enclosed - safe?
Functional x2	Grim
Intriguing	Unsafe x4
Unimaginative	Characterless
Bleak	Hard
Not in the dark	Poor
OK, can see over	Threatening
Cramped	

Functional	Anti-pedestrian
1960s	Scary
Ugly x4	Unusable
Missed	Bleak
opportunity	Dingy
Unsafe x5	Nasty
Utilitarian x3	Ghastly
Vandalised	Neglected
Brutal	Unwelcoming x2
Awful	Bad

WORKSHOP 2 - DOES IT WORK FOR US?

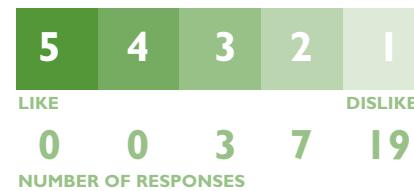
BOUNDARIES



The open plan front gardens planted with bushes and shrubs received a middling response. Nine fours and thirteen threes were accompanied with descriptions such as 'desirable', 'modern' and, above all, 'open'. However, the image also took five twos and a one. While the tidy greenery were associated by some with safety, homeliness and community ('neighbourhood'), some found this environment 'twee' and too 'middle class'. Others found the different bushes 'untidy'.

COMMENTS

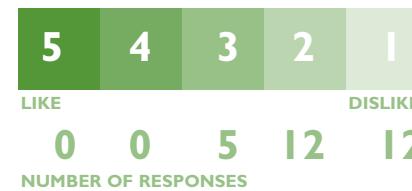
Open x6	Suburban
Modern x2	Pleasant
Desirable	Twee
Bland	Neighbourhood
Public/private	Non-existent
Soft/pretty	Unclear
OK x3	Fussy
Presentable	Untidy x2
Safe	Repulsive
Homely x2	Middle-class



The high iron railings marking the front garden boundary of the two-storey block of four flats was strongly disliked, receiving nineteen ones and seven twos. The design of the fence was overwhelmingly seen as hostile to the public, 'forbidding', 'oppressive' and needlessly 'defensive'. Two participants likened the building to a prison, and less severe critics labelled the image as 'bleak'.

COMMENTS

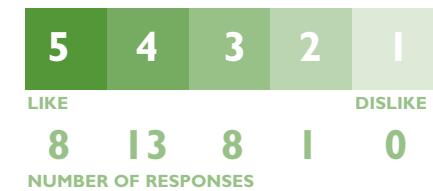
Bleak x5	Severe
Functional	Bad design
Fussy	Forbidding x2
Ugly x2	Grim
Harsh	Scruffy
Dour	Oppressive x2
Territorial	Prison cell x2
Keep out!	Industrial
Security	Horrid x2
Impenetrable	Defensive x2



The chain link fence in front of an unplanted garden and plain white house scored badly, receiving twelve ones, twelve twos, five threes, and no fives or fours. The most commonly used adjective was 'utilitarian', along with 'uncaring' and 'ugly'. The image was described with a number of similar adjectives, all pointing to a lack of interest or care towards the property - 'bland', 'bleak', 'dreary', 'dull' and 'pointless'.

COMMENTS

Living space	Dreary
Acceptable	Unattractive
Estate	Dull
Utilitarian x5	Ghastly
Unloved	High density
Ugly x2	Grim
Brutal	Uncaring x2
Cheap	Pointless
Bland	Council
Bleak	Defensive



The high hedging fronting the street before a red brick Edwardian house received a generally positive response. Eight participants gave the image a five, thirteen a four; eight a three and only one a two. The hedge was liked for being 'neat', 'attractive' and 'appropriate' to its setting. Those who disagreed with this judgement saw it as 'defensive' and 'unimaginative'.

COMMENTS

Appropriate x5	A bygone age
Soft x2	Rural
Perfect	Established
Friendly	Neat
Green	Unimaginative
Lovely	Fair, but hidden
Expensive	Comely
Smart	Defensive
Traditional x3	Normal
Attractive x2	Traditional

WORKSHOP 2 - DOES IT WORK FOR US?

CONCLUSIONS

BUILDING MATERIALS

Traditional materials and styles were valued by many for their historic associations as well as being considered attractive in their own right. Some saw traditional materials and styles as twee. Use of too many different and mismatching materials was not popular.



SHOP SIGNS

Signs which respected historic locations in terms of material and style were well received. Simple, modern signage was considered acceptable by most, although conformity to a nationally standardised design was not liked. Groups of signs displaying bright, mismatched colours did not score highly.



FOOTPATHS

The footpath that scored highly was open and full of greenery. Narrow and dark footpaths were felt to be unsafe. Undecorated, functionally designed routes were seen as acceptable so long as they were well-kept. Functional designs were strongly resented and perceived to be linked to safety problems.



BOUNDARIES

Neat, tidy and well-greened boundaries were, on the whole, popular, although seen by some as too 'bourgeois'. Fences designed without any thought to aesthetic appeal were strongly disliked, particularly if they were tall, giving rise to feelings of defensiveness and disengagement from the public realm. Hedging was popular, but seen as offensive and exclusive if too high.



WORKSHOP 3 - WHERE ARE WE GOING?

Routes and connections

Participants again divided into small groups to discuss the routes that they use within the town and the barriers that they encounter on their journeys. Each group was provided with a large scale plan of Hitchin and different coloured pens. Each participant took a turn to annotate the plan with the routes that they regularly take on foot, by car or by bicycle. Participants then marked the plans with areas where they encountered barriers or edges to their journey. Barriers to movement were identified as not only physical constraints but also psychological barriers that discourage people from visiting place or taking particular routes. These barriers could include graffiti that makes an area feel unsafe or traffic congestion on some roads during peak periods.

Next, participants used the pens to highlight the routes and connections that they would like to make within the town on foot, by car and by bicycle. Finally, they marked favourite views and places to visit.

WORKSHOP 3 - WHERE ARE WE GOING?

Routes

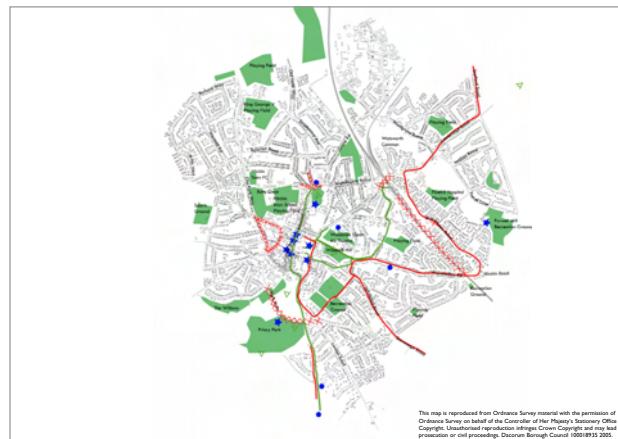
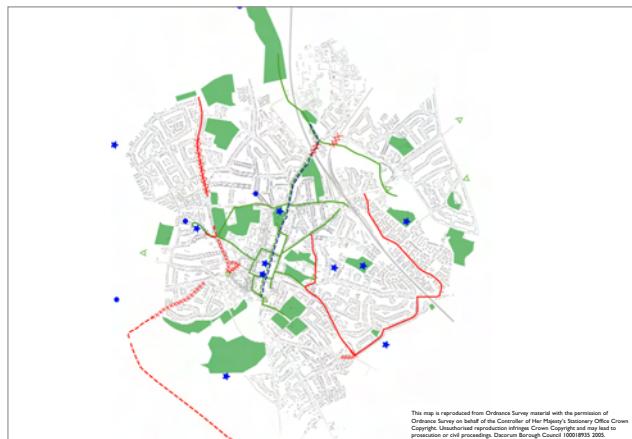
Driving routes followed the main radial routes in and out of town, and around the town centre via Park Road, Fishpond Road, Highbury Road and St John's Road. Despite its length, the route from the town centre to Cambridge Road via Wymondley Road was repeatedly shown. Relatively few cycle routes were drawn, covering only the town centre and traffic route around it. Many pedestrian networks were shown, covering the town centre and linking it with green spaces throughout Hitchin.

Barriers

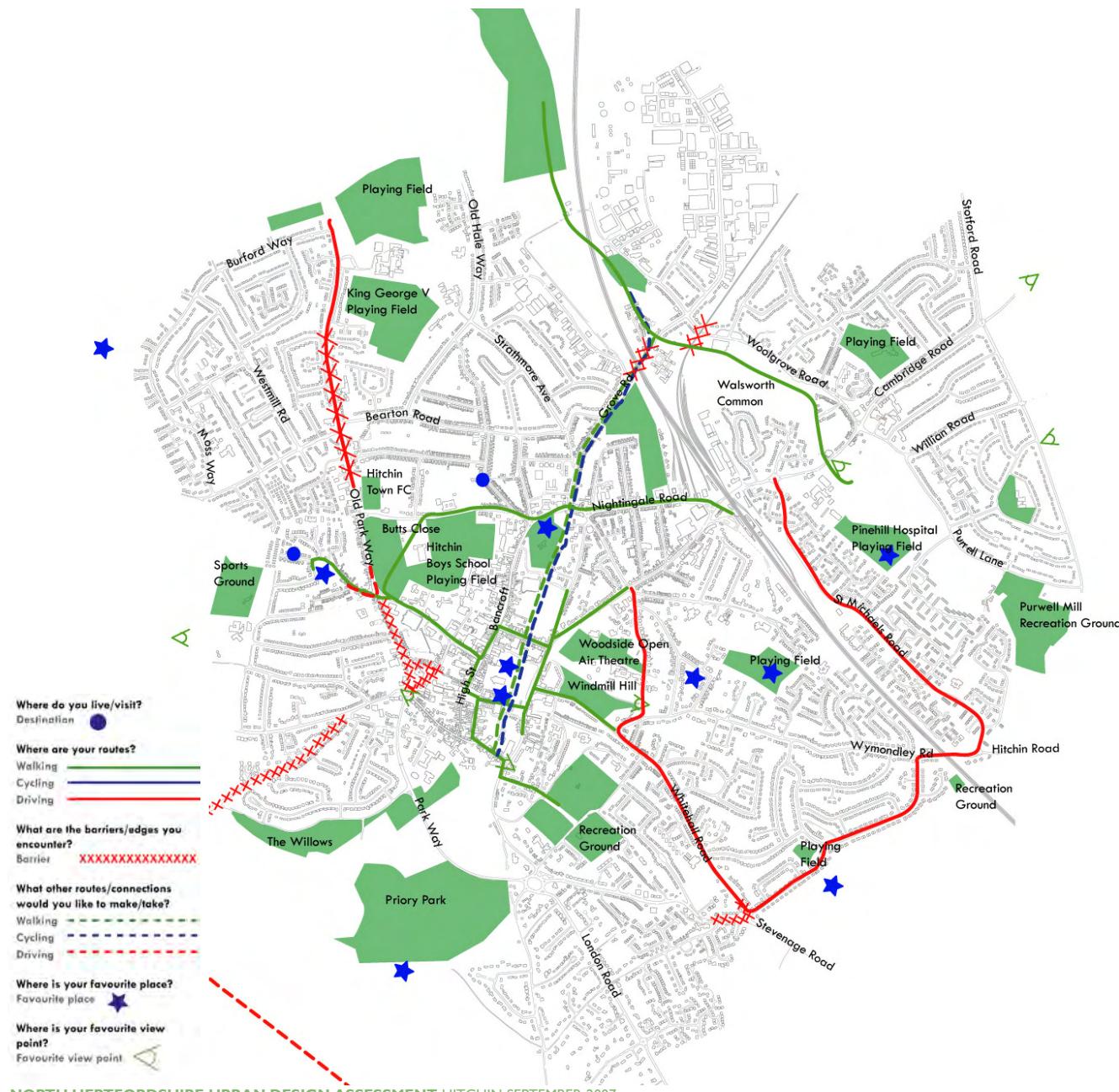
Traffic congestion created barriers in several places, both to pedestrians and cyclists trying to cross roads, and to traffic flow around Hitchin; along Parkway and the roundabouts at either end, and on the Payne's Park one-way system. The railway was considered a barrier to motorists, pedestrians and cyclists, with only three crossing points, all of which are often congested.

Favourite views and places

Green spaces around Hitchin provided most of the favourite places and views, particularly Windmill Hill and Priory Park. The market area of the town centre was another favourite locality.



Group I



Residents' houses and destinations

Residents identified homes/destinations located on York Road and Victoria Way.

Routes

Two traffic routes were identified as the most important: the A600 heading north from Old Park Way and a route leading between St Michaels Road and Whitehall Road, via Oakfield Avenue and the bottom of Ninesprings Way. Pedestrian routes were concentrated around the Town Centre Zone, plus Nightingale Road, Walsworth Road and Bedford Road. No cycle routes were suggested.

Barriers

Traffic congestion was identified as the main barrier, particularly bad areas located at several different points in the town: the northern end of Old Park Way, Offley Road, the gateway junction from Stevenage Road, the railway underpass at Grove Road and the underpass at Woolgrove Road.

Desired connections

Group I suggested the need for a bypass to the south of the town to ease traffic congestion in the centre. It also suggested a riverside foot and cycle path.

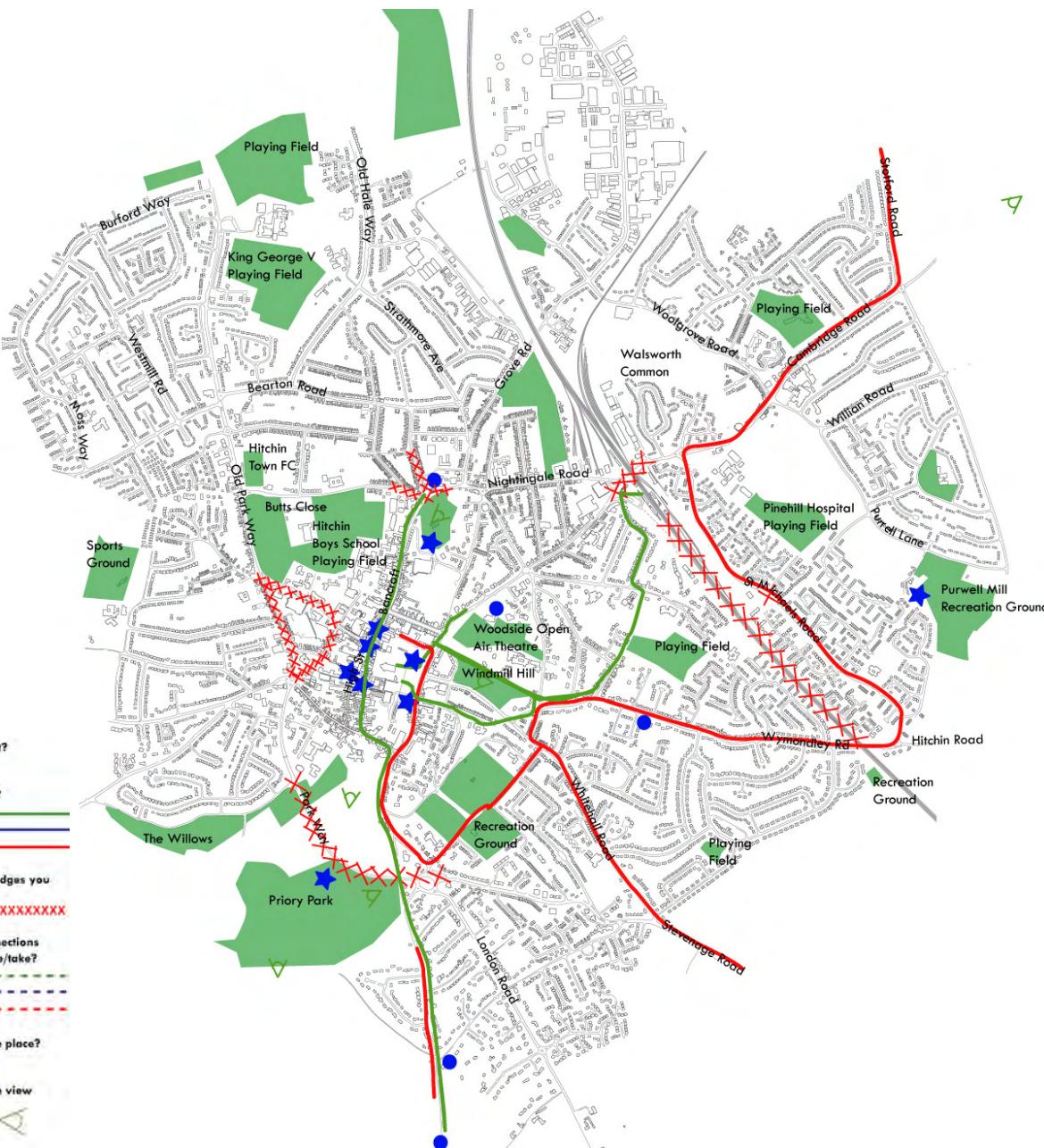
Favourite places

Favourite places were green spaces such as Priory Park, publicly accessible playing fields and the market area of Hitchin town centre.

Favourite view points

Windmill Hill in the Town Centre Zone was a favourite view, within the town, as was the view along both Tilehouse street and Bridge Street. The view east from Wilshire Crescent was marked, as well as views looking into Hitchin along Cambridge Road and Grays Lane.

Group 2



Residents' houses and destinations
Houses and destinations were dispersed across Hitchin.

Routes

The main driving route linked the town centre with Cambridge Road via Wymondley Road. Several pedestrian routes ran through the Windmill Hill area into the town centre, and north along Bancroft. Another ran south down Hitchin Road, and a route was marked from Wymondley Road to the station via pedestrian alleys and Chiltern Road.

Barriers

Traffic congestion was a key barrier, causing problems for motorists at the Nightingale Road/Bancroft /Ickleford Road junction and at the railway bridge at the end of Nightingale Road. The Old Park Road/Bedford Road/Payne's Park one-way system was considered to isolate the area it surrounds and Park Way was seen to split Priory Park from the rest of the settlement. Underpasses on St Michael's Road and Old Park Way were also marked as barriers.

Desired connections

No desired routes were marked.

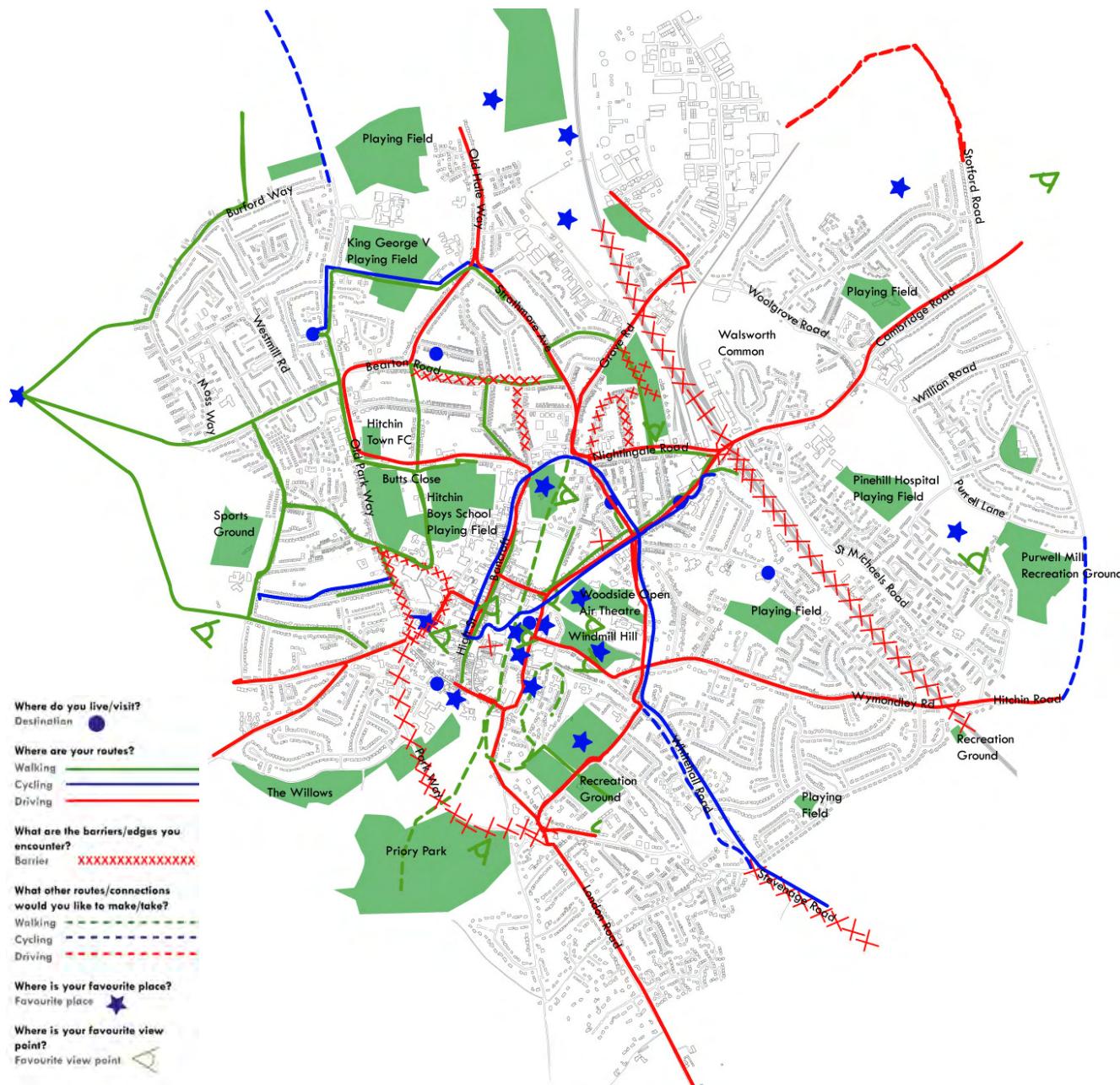
Favourite places

Four favourite places were marked in the town centre as well as one in Priory Park, one in Purwell Recreation Ground, and one at the recreation ground at the north end of Bancroft.

Favourite view points

Two members of the group marked Priory Park as the location of a favourite view point. Windmill Hill was also marked, as well as the view along Cambridge Road from outside Hitchin.

Group 3



Residents' houses and destinations

Houses were identified in the north-east of the town, and destinations in the town centre.

Routes

Many driving routes were mapped to cover several of the routes leading out of town to the east and south east, as well as in and around the town centre along roads such as Tilehouse Street, Queen Street, Bancroft and Highbury Road.

Barriers

Group 3 marked a number of barriers, explained with helpful comments: Stevenage Road and Park Way were considered to be very cyclist and pedestrian unfriendly, with only two places to cross. The Churchgate shopping centre was considered a barrier due to its unattractive architectural style. The industrial area was described as being 'threatening at night', with the single entrance to the industrial estate via the residential area making this a particularly significant issue. The whole railway line was marked as a barrier, with the comment that there are 'only three crossing points, all of which are constricted'. The one-way system leading onto Park Way was defined as a barrier; as were the cul-de-sacs in the new development south of Convent Close.

Desired connections

The group suggested new cycle routes leading out of Hitchin on Whitehall Road, London Road and Bedford Road, and also a pedestrian riverside walk.

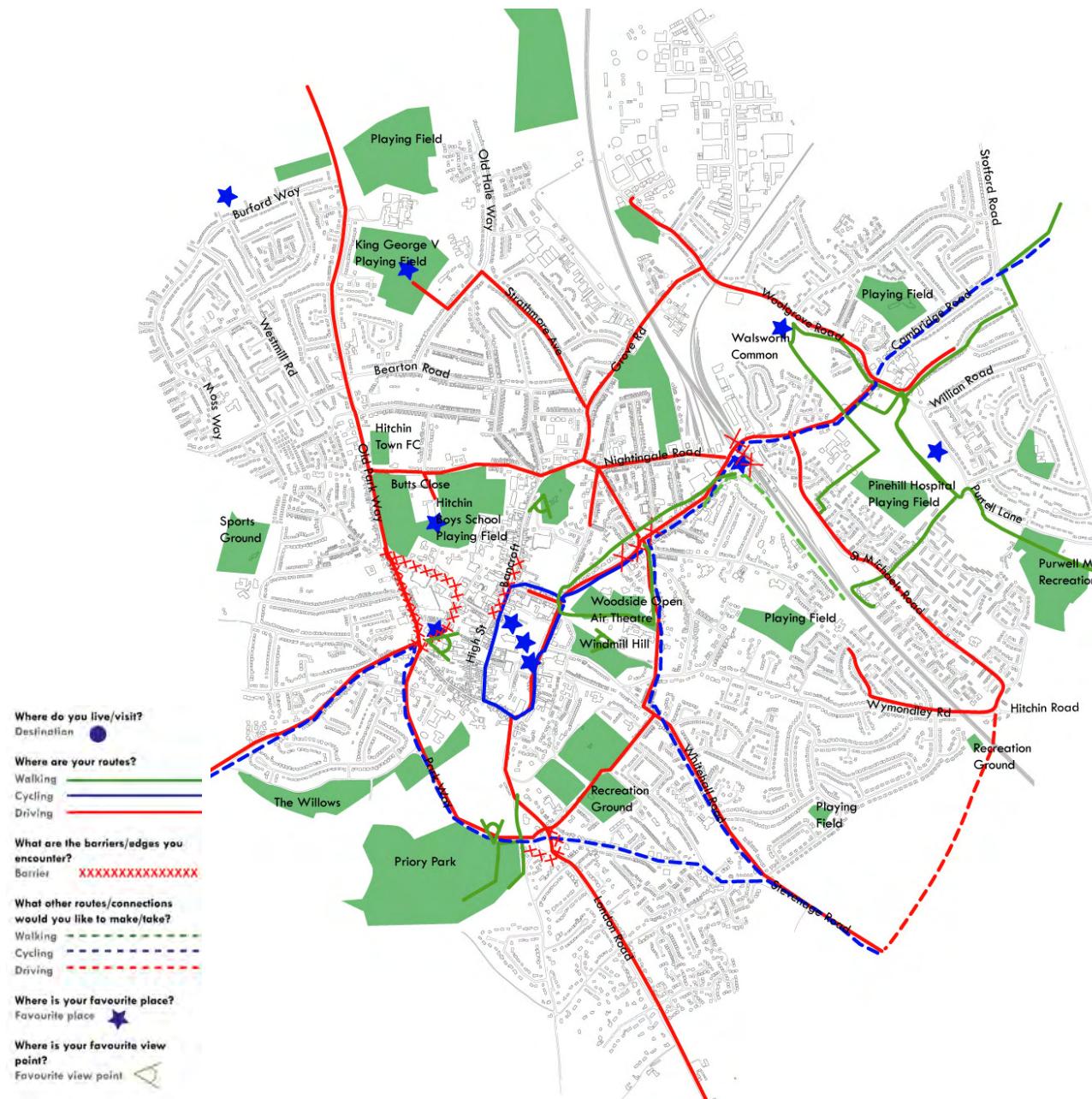
Favourite places

Stars were located on several of the green spaces in Hitchin, as well as Oughton Head outside Hitchin.

Favourite view points

Priory Park, Purwell Meadows and Windmill Hill were the views marked within Hitchin. The vista along Grays Lane into Hitchin was noted.

Group 4



Residents' houses and destinations
Group 4 did not mark houses or destinations.

Routes

The group marked driving routes encircling the town centre along Parkway, Fishpond Road, Verulam Road, Highbury Road and St John's Road. Park Street/Queen Street was marked within the town centre. Bedford Road, Stevenage Road and London Road were marked as driving routes out of Hitchin. Stratmore Avenue and Woolgrave Road were also noted to the north of Hitchin. A cycle route ran along Walsworth Road and around the town centre via Queens Street and High Street. Two areas of pedestrian movement were shown, one around the town centre and one around Purwell Meadows.

Barriers

The one-way system at the north end of Park Way was marked, as was the bridge over the road to the north of the station and the London Road/Stevenage Road roundabout where pedestrian and cycle crossing is difficult. Other types of barriers were suggested: buildings considered unattractive, such as Woodcote House, the frontage of Wilkinson's, the Old Telephone Exchange and Churchgate Market. Cul-de-sacs in the Post-war Suburban Zone were noted, as well as the reduction of public activities in Priory Park.

Desired connections

A second driving route to the Employment Zone from Stoford Road was suggested as well as a route bypassing the town between Hitchin Road and Stevenage Road. Improved cycle links from Stevenage to Luton and Letchworth were requested along with marked routes along Park Way, Walsworth Road and Whitehall Road within Royston. A pedestrian route was marked linking the entrance to the station with the bridge at the bottom of Benslow Lane.

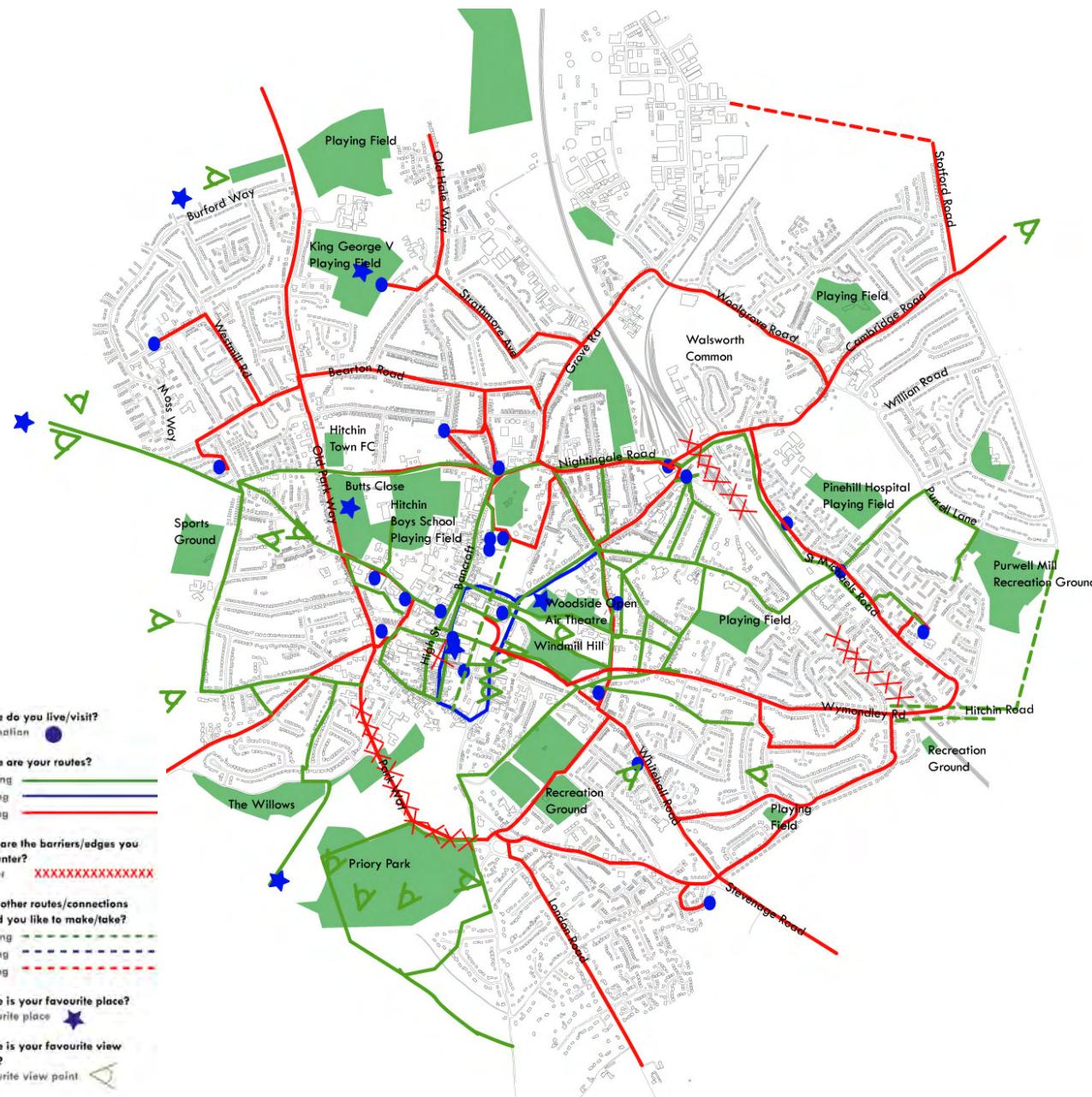
Favourite places

Most of the favourite places were marked in the town centre, with one at Oughton head, one at the King George V playing field, and one at Walsworth Common. Group 4 also listed favourite places: the swimming centre, the museum/library/physic garden, the Railway station, the River Purwell, Purwell Meadows, River Hiz, St Mary's Church, The Biggin, Oughton Head Common and Barnwell Park Bowls and Tennis Club.

Favourite view points

Group 4 registered favourite views along Bancroft, across the town from Windmill Hill and Priory Park, and into Market Square through West Alley.

Group 5



Residents' houses and destinations

Destinations were dispersed throughout the Town Centre Zone, with houses around the outskirts, including four along St Michaels Road.

Routes

This group marked driving routes forming a ring around the town centre, and the main radial routes out of Hitchin. The group drew a dense network of pedestrian routes in the town centre, spreading across to the Low Density Mixed Residential Zone and over the railway line to Purwell Lane.

Barriers

The railway line was marked as a barrier at the bridge to the north-west of the station, and in between the bridge over Wymondley Road and the footbridge further north. The Woolgrove Road/Cambridge Road roundabout and Parkway were noted as areas of congestion, and the uneven surface in Market Square as another barrier.

Desired connections

A secondary traffic access route to the Employment Zone from Stotfold Road was suggested and two pedestrian paths, one linking Hitchin Road with Purwell Lane, the other linking the station with the railway footbridge at the bottom of Benslow Lane.

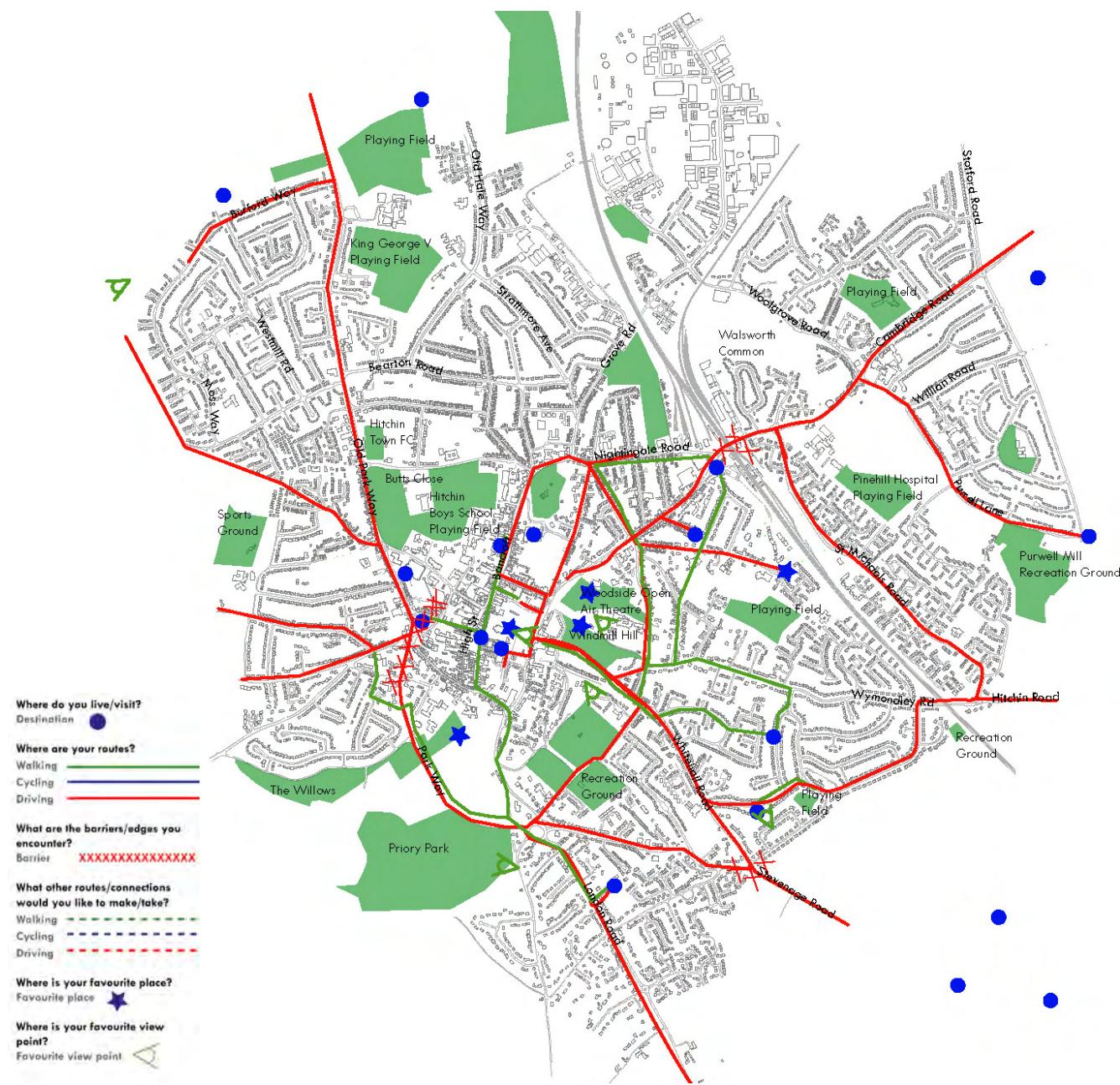
Favourite places

Green spaces were popular with group 5: Butt's Close, Windmill Hill, King George V playing field, St Mary's Church and Market Square were also marked.

Favourite view points

Within the town centre, Group 5 marked Windmill Hill views into town from Queen Street and across Priory Park. The group also marked several views into and out of Hitchin; inwards along Cambridge Road, and outwards from Redhill Road and Pirton Road.

Group 6



Residents' houses and destinations

Towns lying around Hitchin were marked as destinations, along with various shops in the centre, and Market square.

Routes

Driving routes were marked out of Hitchin along Cambridge Road, Hitchin Road, Stevenage Road London Road and Bedford Road. The main routes within Stevenage were Bancroft/Highbury Road/St John's Road and Nightingale Road. St Michael's Road and Ninesprings Way/Oakfield Road were marked as routes from the centre to the Cambridge Road gateway.

Barriers

Group 6 marked barriers to pedestrians and cyclists at the roundabouts at each end of Parkway, and to motorists at the road underpass next to the station. The group also marked the difficult right-turn on entering Hitchin from Stevenage Road.

Desired connections

The group did not mark any desired connections.

Favourite places

Favourite places were marked in the town centre and at Windmill Hill.

Favourite view points

Favourite views were next to the River Hiz in front of the church, around Windmill Hill, and one looking inwards from Lindsay Avenue.