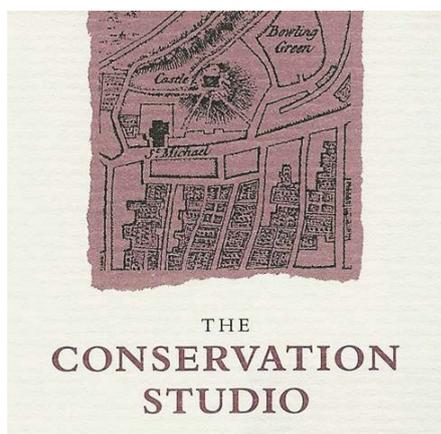




BUTTS CLOSE, HITCHIN

CONSERVATION AREA: CHARACTER STATEMENT 26 JULY 2011

Whilst conducting a second review of Hitchin Conservation Area, areas beyond the existing conservation area boundary were considered for designation. Butts Close, Hitchin Conservation Area is a new designation and this statement assesses its setting, character and appearance and should be read in conjunction with the conservation area map and the up-dated Register of Buildings of Local Interest for Hitchin (also adopted on 26 July 2011).



This document has been prepared for North Hertfordshire District Council by:

THE CONSERVATION STUDIO,
1 Querns Lane,
Cirencester,
Glos GL7 1RL

T: 01285 642428

E: info@theconservationstudio.co.uk

www.theconservationstudio.co.uk

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Butts Close, Hitchin Conservation Area designation followed extensive consultation with the local community. The assistance of the Hitchin Historical Society with the provision of background information leading to the designation is gratefully acknowledged.

As recommended in English Heritage guidance dated March 2011, this Character Statement assesses the setting, character and appearance of the Conservation Area, and identifies negative features where improvements would be welcome.

Because of the size and nature of the Conservation Area, it has been divided into three Character Areas, each of which has a unique character and appearance. An assessment of each of these Character Areas is included at Chapter 7, which also identifies areas for improvements. A summary of the principal issues are in Chapter 8.

Whilst this statement is a completely separate document from the Hitchin Conservation Area Character Statement (also adopted 26 July 2011), the latter may still provide a useful reference.

2 SUMMARY

The special interest that justifies designation of the Butts Close, Hitchin Conservation Area derives from a number of architectural, historic and environmental factors, including:

- The centrepiece of the Conservation Area is Butts Close, the oldest remaining open space in the town and now an attractive public park which is notable for its physical features, such as the mature trees, the pond, the meadow area and the many pathways which cross it
- Slight changes in the topography, with the land falling towards the pond, add to the area's interest, and provide a number of particularly notable views across the open spaces
- On the eastern side of Butts Close is the locally listed open-air Swimming Pool (1938) with a 1990s building close by which houses an indoor pool and a health club, all of which are in accord with the leisure-orientated uses in Butts Close
- The Wilshere-Dacre Junior School (1928) is located in Fishponds Road and is also locally listed, with a group of well detailed houses (Nos. 50-66 even) immediately adjacent, overlooking the Swimming Pool
- Adjacent to the south east corner of Butts Close, Elmside Lodge is also locally listed
- In addition to the three locally listed buildings detailed above, there are a large number of well detailed historic buildings which it is considered make a 'positive' contribution to the area, most notably along the west side of Butts Close facing Bedford Road – these date to the mid to late 19th century
- Oughton Head Way connects Butts Close to a further area of open green space and contains a further number of positive late 19th century cottages and smaller houses, mainly arranged in pairs or short terraces
- Taylors Cottages and Crispin Cottages are short, late 19th century terraces and are set back from the road at right angles to it
- The Sir John Barleycorn Public House in Oughton Head Way dates to 1869 and gives the area some focus

- The tranquility of the green spaces in Butts Close and the green in Oughton Head Way contrasts with the busy traffic along Bedford Road.
- The Conservation Area is mostly in residential uses with leisure activities focused on the two swimming pools, the two public houses, and the open green spaces



Butts Close

3 ACTIVITIES, LOCATION AND SETTING

3.1 Location and setting

The Butts Close, Hitchin Conservation Area forms part of the historic town of Hitchin, one of the largest (population around 30,500) settlements in north Hertfordshire. Letchworth Garden City is just a few kilometres away to the north east, separated from Hitchin by a strip of open countryside. The River Hiz flows northwards through Hitchin, dropping down from the Chiltern Hills, but it is little more than a stream and in some locations in the town it has been culverted. The Butts Close, Hitchin Conservation Area lies close to the much larger Hitchin Conservation Area which covers the town centre and some of the residential suburbs to the north and east. The two conservation areas are separated by modern school playing fields, of no special interest, which are owned by the adjoining Hitchin Boys Grammar School.

The setting to the Butts Close, Hitchin Conservation Area is provided by residential suburbs to the north and west, and Hitchin town centre to the east and south east. Immediately adjoining Butts Close to the east are the playing fields of Hitchin Boys Grammar School, with late 19th and early 20th century residential development to the north east and part north. A football field for the Hitchin Town Football Club (which is not visible from Butts Close due to fencing and mature trees) lies on the north side of Fishponds Road, and more recent residential development (Greenside Drive) to the west of the houses which face Bedford Road. Further, mainly 19th century buildings lie to the south west, with large blocks of 20th century development, mostly in commercial uses, to the south of the junction of Bedford Road and Old Park Road.



Hitchin Swimming Pool



The Sir John Barleycorn Public House

3.2 Activities and uses

Uses within the Conservation Area are relatively mixed, with commercial premises, leisure related facilities, two schools, and a large number of houses, most of which appear to be in use as family homes rather than as flats. The largest and most dominant use is provided by the 1938 open-air swimming pool and the adjoining 'Hitchin Centre', which includes an indoor pool and the Archers Fitness Centre. This lies in the north east section of Butts Close. The open-air pool is open to the public from the end of May until the beginning of September, and inevitably generates a certain amount of additional noise and vehicular activity at peak times.

On the north side of Fishponds Road, the Wilshere-Dacre Junior School is another dominant building, which also generates traffic and activity at certain times of the day. The York Road Nursery School is located in a modestly sized modern building which is somewhat 'tucked away' at the back of the green open space which provides an appropriate setting to the much larger Primary School. Along the west side of Bedford Road are a number of 19th century houses which are mainly used as family homes although one, on the corner of Oughton Head Way, is the Westbourne Care Home. There are two public houses, the Sir John Barleycorn in Oughton Head Way and the Bedford Arms in Bedford Road. A third public house, the Silver Moon, also faces Bedford Road but was closed at the time of survey. There is just one shop, a car parts supplier, also in Bedford Road. All of these commercial uses are located in domestic scale 19th century buildings, so they do not stand out particularly from their residential neighbours.

3.3 Topography and geology

The Conservation Area sits on gently undulating land which can most clearly be seen looking across Butts Close, where the land dips slightly towards the pond. This pond is fed by a spring which gets its water from the Gaping Hills, and water run-off from the pond forms a small stream (the Capswell Brook) which almost immediately disappears into a culvert underneath the Grammar School, re-emerging to the rear of Bancroft car park where it joins the River Hiz. The name 'Oughton Head Way' refers to the proximity of another spring which rises on the other side of Conservation Area and which feeds into the River Oughton, which flows around the west of the town. Geologically, Hitchin lies on Chiltern Hills chalk with surface alluvial deposits and clay, and where the chalk and clay interface, springs often occur as evidenced above.



Butts Close pond



View towards the pond

4 HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

4.1 History of the conservation area

Butts Close is the oldest remaining open space in Hitchin. By the end of the 14th century it was being used for games and for archery practice ('butts' means 'target') although its primary function was as an open space for grazing animals. In 1730 it was used temporarily as a market place when smallpox closed the main market place in the centre of the town. Butts Close is shown on the 1818 map as a recognisable open space within a rural setting to the north and east of the junction of Bedford Road and Old Park Road, which together form an historic route in and out of Hitchin. It was still used for grazing animals but also for other functions such as an occasional cricket ground for the boys from the Free School in Tilehouse Street. No buildings are shown, although by the mid 1830s a few houses are noted further south along Old Park Road. Some of the land was owned by the Wilshere-Dacres, a prominent Hitchin Quaker family.

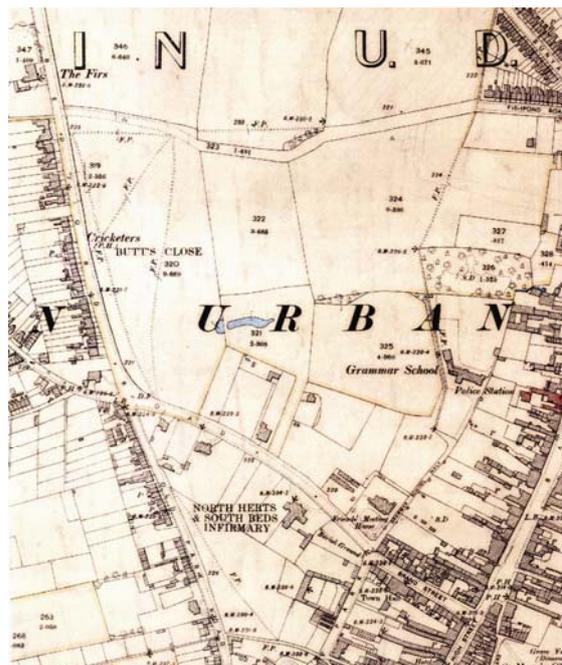
Like much of Hitchin, new development appears to have been instigated by the coming of the railway in 1850. Providence Row, which forms part of a very similar group of nine terraced properties facing Bedford Road, is dated 1869, the same date as the Sir John Barleycorn Public House in Oughton Head Way. The map of 1881 shows how houses had been added along most of the west side of Bedford Road, and footpaths are also shown crossing 'Butts Close'. Three ponds are also illustrated, of which only the larger remains.

The map of 1898 confirms that a new road (Fishponds Road) had been constructed to connect Bancroft to Bedford Road. Meanwhile buildings had begun to encroach on the open space around Butts Close with the addition of Hitchin Boys Grammar School (in 1890) and a few new houses, with large gardens, along the north side of Bedford Road. Otherwise the open land was still used for animals and the occasional fair or circus. Little had changed by 1923 although the kink in Fishponds Road, which reflected an historic field boundary, had been ironed out and a few houses (nos. 50-64 even) added. Of note is the survival of open fields to the north of Fishponds Road which is now occupied by the grounds of the Hitchin Town Football Club and the Wilshere-Dacre Junior School, built in 1928. By this time, Butts Close was being used as a public park or as allotments, and also, from the 1950s onwards, as the location for the annual Hitchin Fair which became the Hitchin Carnival from the 1960s onwards. The pink horse-chestnut trees along the west side of Butts Close and the elms facing the school playing fields were all planted to commemorate the coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth in 1937. An open swimming pool was built to the east of Butts Close on land which had once been used as allotments in 1938, and a modern pool, sensitively designed, was added to the existing complex of buildings in the 1990s. This was the last major intervention in the Conservation Area, which has otherwise retained a large number of 19th and early 20th century buildings, most of which are considered to make a positive contribution to the character of the area.

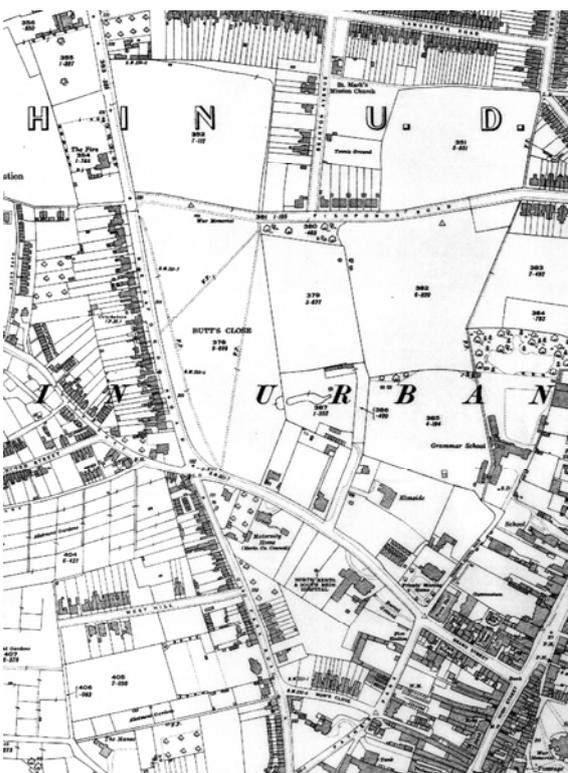
A detailed description of the development of Hitchin as a whole has been included within the Hitchin Conservation Area Character Statement.



Historic Map of 1881



Historic Map of 1898



Historic Map of 1923



Historic Map of 1946

5 SPATIAL ANALYSIS

5.1 Relationship of buildings to spaces

Probably more than half of the Conservation Area is open green space made up by Butts Close, the green at the western end of Oughton Head Way, and the grassed area around Wilshere-Dacre Junior School. The buildings form definite groups – the first small group lies on the north side of Fishponds Road and is represented by eight Inter-War houses which sit back slightly from the road all with the same building line. They were clearly positioned to take advantage of views over Butts Close and the school playing fields. The second group lie along the west side of the busy Bedford Road, again taking in long views over Butts Close. They form an almost continuous group which again shares a common building line and similar heights, details and materials. Overall, they form a pleasing backdrop in the reverse views out of Butts Close. The third and final group of more modestly sized buildings lie off Oughton Head Way. These are also mainly mid to late 19th century but the building line varies slightly and there are two examples of short terraces set in backland sites which are hardly visible from the road. Some of the properties in Oughton Head Way have views over the green towards more modern houses and a group of mature trees.



Oughton Head Green



Mown pathway across Butts Close

5.2 Trees and hard and soft landscaped open spaces

The Butts Close, Hitchin Conservation Area is notable for the large open green space (Butts Close) which forms the principal feature of the area. Although the two swimming pools (which are both buildings of some architectural merit) have been added, this space retains a pleasant ambiance which is heightened by the mature trees along most of its boundaries. The space is also managed in an environmentally friendly way, with areas of long grass and wild flowers which are only cut once a year so that small animals and invertebrates can use them as a food source and as a habitat. Winding paths are cut through this meadow-like setting in the summer, providing a series of well used pathways. The pond adds to the area's attractions to wildlife. The open space is framed by the tall trees which lie along its various frontages facing Bedford Road, Fishponds Road and the school playing fields.

The most important trees are marked on the Townscape Appraisal Map, but their position and crown spread is indicative only, and the omission of a particular tree does not mean that it is of no significance.

6 THE BUILDINGS

6.1 Listed buildings

There are currently no listed buildings in the Conservation Area although the grade II listed Hitchin Boys Grammar School is located close by.

6.2 Buildings of local interest

North Hertfordshire District Council currently maintains a *Register of Buildings of Local Interest for Hitchin* (BLIs), more commonly referred to as 'locally listed' buildings, many of which lie within the Conservation Area. This was first compiled between 1997 and 1998. Some of the buildings date to the late 19th or early 20th century and are interesting examples of local vernacular styles or materials. They may also have particular significance for their association with local people or a local historical event, or have social or political significance. The criteria for selecting BLIs is given in the *Register*.

In conjunction with a review of Hitchin Conservation Area and with the assistance of the Hitchin Historical Society, the District Council has reviewed the existing Register of Buildings of Local Interest (BLI's). A total of 96 buildings are now included in the Register. Three of these buildings lie within the Butts Close, Hitchin Conservation Area as follows:

Elmside Lodge, Elmside Walk

Elmside Lodge/Cottage was built c1879; an attractive late Victorian structure in vernacular-picturesque style with distinctive brick chimney, monogrammed plaque, pargetting, moulded plasterwork and original (dated) rainwater fittings; little altered and an important street feature. The Lodge has close connections to Hitchin Quaker banker James Hack Tuke, a pioneer in female education (Benslow House/Girton College) and Irish land reform.

Outdoor Swimming Pool, Fishpond's Road

Unusual survivor of 1930s Lido style open air pool with fountain and a single storey red brick facilities building adjacent; opened in 1938; commemorative Hitchin Urban District Council arms and date stone; forms a focal point in the street scene and a feature of Butts Close hard by; attractive modern swimming centre shares the Pool site.

Wilshere-Dacre Junior School, Fishpond's Road

Well preserved typical 1920s style school, successor to the Hitchin British Schools, built 1928-29 with commemorative plaque and later clock-tower.



Wilshere-Dacre School, Fishponds Road



Elmside Lodge

6.3 Positive buildings

Most of the unlisted buildings in the Butts Close, Hitchin Conservation Area have been identified as being 'positive' buildings and these are marked on the Townscape Appraisal Map, along with the locally listed buildings.

The criteria for the selection of 'positive' buildings is that they are buildings of townscape merit which are considered to make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Commonly they will be good examples of relatively unaltered historic buildings where their style, detailing and building materials provide the streetscape with interest and variety. Most importantly, 'positive' buildings contribute to the special interest of the Conservation Area, often forming notable groups which help to define the streetscape within the conservation area.

Butts Close, Hitchin Conservation Area is a Designated Heritage Asset with regard to PPS 5 :*Planning for the Historic Environment*. Most importantly, both BLI's and 'positive' buildings contribute to the special interest of the conservation area, and both categories of buildings are regarded as Non-designated Heritage Assets. Policies HE2, HE7, HE8 and HE9 of PPS5 are of particular relevance as are paragraphs 15 and 83 of the accompanying English Heritage Practice Guide.

6.4 Ages, styles, materials and details

The majority of the buildings in the Conservation Area date to between the 1860s and the end of the 19th century, and can be found in Bedford Road and Oughton Head Way. Because Fishponds Road was not built until the end of the 19th century, the buildings along here are later – Nos. 50-64 date to around 1920 and the Wilshere-Dacre Junior School was not built until 1928. The Swimming Pool, on the opposite side of Fishponds Road, is dated 1938. The earliest buildings in the Conservation Area are probably Providence Row in Bedford Road, dating to 1869, and the Sir John Barleycorn Public House, of the same date.

Most of these properties were built as two storey semi-detached or terraced houses, the more modestly sized properties being in Oughton Head Way and the larger, more prestigious houses being in Bedford Road, where they faced the open spaces of Butts Close. They are all built from brick, usually a bright red or a mid brown colour, with pitched roofs covered in grey natural slate which was probably brought in on the railway from Wales. Whilst the cottages in Oughton Head Way tend to be flat fronted (although a few have ground floor bay windows) and relatively plain, the houses facing Bedford Road are higher status, and have a range of decorative details including two storey bay windows facing the street and large sash windows.



Nos.29 and 30 Oughton Head Way



Unlisted but 'positive' buildings in Bedford Road

More details about individual buildings are included in the descriptions of the buildings in each Character Area in Chapter 7.

7 CHARACTER AREAS

The Butts Close, Hitchin Conservation Area has been divided into three Character Areas according to each area's layout, open spaces and buildings. These Character Areas are:

Character Area 1: Fishponds Road

Character Area 2: Butts Close and Bedford Road

Character Area 3: Oughton Head Way and the green

7.1 Character Area 1: Fishponds Road

General description

Fishponds Road was not laid out until the late 19th century and development in this Character Area therefore dates to the 20th century. The Character Area is dominated by the Wilshere-Dacre Junior School, which sits back from Fishponds Road, facing the Grammar School Playing Fields on the opposite side of the road. The School retains a large area of open green space, simply grassed, and a number of important mature trees around its boundaries. Three single storey buildings have been added over the years, no doubt to provide additional accommodation, but these are detrimental to the setting of the locally listed building. A small alleyway leads around two sides of the site, with a particularly notable brick wall along one part of it which presumably predates the school. The wall is about two metres high and part of it has a triangular brick coping. Although the road is busy with traffic, the close proximity of Butts Close, the school playing fields, and many mature trees provide an almost rural quality to this part of Hitchin. Further west, many of the front gardens to the residential properties on the north side of the road are bounded by low wooden palisade fences which appear to be original, and which are supplemented by attractive planting in the adjoining front gardens.



Fishponds Road (Nos.50 – 64 on left)



No.52 Fishponds Road

The public realm

Street lighting is provided by very tall steel standards. The pavements are covered in tarmac and the kerbstones are a mixture of concrete and granite, with adjoining granite gutters.

The buildings

The Wilshere-Dacre Junior School dates to 1928 – a detailed description is included in Chapter 6 para. 6.2 *Buildings of local interest*. The only other buildings are the modern Nursery School (of no special interest), and, facing Fishponds Road, a group of six paired 1920s houses (Nos. 50-62 even). These are notable for their cream painted rendered elevations, each with a tall gable facing the street with a terracotta diamond-shaped motif for decoration. These gables are cantilevered out toward the street and supported on moulded brackets and on two storey bay windows with casement windows and clay tile hanging. Clay tiled roofs, which sweep down to form a porch, have two light dormer windows in them, also original. No. 52 appears to be the best preserved of the group. Nos. 64 and 66, on either side of Bearton Avenue, are a matching pair of detached houses and similarly detailed to Nos. 50-62.

Important views

Views 1, 2 and 3: These views are from the pavement of Fishponds Road over the playing fields associated with Hitchin Boys Grammar School. They take in the mature trees facing Elmside Walk and, in the far distance, the both modern and listed buildings which form the core of the school.

Key Negative features

- Very busy traffic along Fishponds Road (although controlled traffic lights provide pedestrians with a safe way of crossing to the Swimming Pool)
- All of the windows in the school have been changed to uPVC
- Most of the windows in the residential properties are also uPVC
- Graffiti on the boundary fences and walls facing the alleyway around the school
- Poor quality boundaries, such as corrugated tin sheet, facing this alleyway
- The brick wall around part of the school site is in need of repair

Issues and opportunities for enhancement

- The protection of the views over the school playing fields
- The protection of the setting to the Wilshere-Dacre Junior School, including the open green space and the mature trees
- Improvements to the public realm

7.2 Character Area 2: Butts Close and Bedford Road

General description

Butts Close is an attractive public open green space which is used for recreational purposes. Mature trees, dating to the 1937 planting, lie along a slightly raised bank next to Bedford Road. The pond, surrounded by a meadow-like setting, is the main feature and sits in a slight dip. Meandering paths across the space are well used and provide a link from the south of the town to the locally listed open-air swimming pool and the more recent heated inside pool which lies adjacent. On the west side of Bedford Road is a long line of mid to late 19th century houses, some of them in commercial uses. Whilst the majority are well cared for, others appear somewhat neglected.



View across Butts Close to the modern swimming pool and the locally listed outdoor pool beyond



The Bedford Arms Public House, Bedford Road

The public realm

Details within this Character Area are all modern of no special merit. They include the poor quality wooden benches with concrete supports in Butts Close, and, in places, overflowing litter bins. Street lighting is provided by tall steel standards, similar to Fishponds Road. Some of the paths across Butts Close are in need of resurfacing.

Concrete bollards, probably dating to the late 1930s, create a boundary between Butts Close and the pavement facing Bedford Road, but they have lost their original metal chains which would have once linked them. Facing Fishponds Road, a modern low timber railing on short posts provides a very simple boundary.

The buildings

The buildings divided simply into the long group of houses facing Bedford Road which date to between 1860 and the end of the 19th century, and the 1938 Swimming Pool in Butts Close. Two further buildings of some note are also within the Character Area, a late Victorian house which has been extended, which sits behind a very substantial brick wall facing the south east boundary of Butts Close, and in the far corner of Butts Close, adjacent to the southern end of Elmside Walk, Elmside Lodge, a locally listed building.

Important views

Views 1, 2 and 3: These take in the wide green swathe of the Grammar School Playing fields, with the modern and historic school buildings in the far distance. They are also note the line of trees facing Fishponds Road and along the edge of Elmside Walk.

View 4: This looks over the pond, the meadows with wide pathways which lead around it, and the many mature trees. A drop in level focused these views.

View 5: This view (if taken from Elmside Walk) is constrained by the sub-station but again this focuses the eye on the long pathway through the meadow-like park, with many mature trees.



View 8 towards the two swimming pools

View 6: With view 4, this is probably the prettiest view within the park as it is almost entirely of trees, green space, and water. The pond is the focal feature, with the large willow beyond.

View 7: This is the view for many of the users of the park on entering the park from the south before crossing the large open space by the winding central pathway. It takes in the grass, mature trees and general spaciousness of the area. Whilst the new swimming pool is a very large building, the simplicity of the red tiled roof, and the mature trees around the boundary, help to minimise its impact.

View 8 and View 9: These views from the pavement of Bedford Road look over the pleasantly green open space of the park towards the 1930s and 1990s buildings beyond. In the summer months the mature trees help to shield these buildings from these views.

View 10: This view from Fishponds Road takes in the whole expanse of the park including the slight changes in level towards the pond, although this is not visible from the northernmost extent of the park.

Views 11 and 12: These views over Oughton Head Way green take in the trees in the southwest corner.

Key Negative features

Butts Close:

- Rubbish in the pond
- Graffiti on the brick boundary wall and sub-station in the south east corner of Butts Close
- Graffiti on the front boundary fence outside Elmside Lodge

Buildings facing Bedford Road:

- Busy traffic along the road
- The former Silver Moon Public House is empty and boarded up
- Some of the windows have been replaced in uPVC
- Some of the front boundaries and front gardens have been lost due to the creation of car parking spaces
- Some of these front gardens are neglected
- Whilst the occasional building is extremely well preserved, others are in a poor state of repair, particularly the slate roofs
- Some of these slate roofs have been replaced using concrete tiles
- The Bedford Arms Public House is in need of external refurbishment and has very little off-street parking for its clients



Elmside Walk



Houses in Bedford Road

Issues and opportunities for enhancement

Butts Close:

- The continued management of Butts Close and the ponds, trees and the open green spaces
- Elmside Walk would benefit from improvements to the surface treatment and lighting
- Butts Close generally would benefit from new public seating and litter bins
- Consider reinstating the chain link between the concrete bollards

Buildings facing Bedford Road:

- The protection of the views over Butts Close
- Improvements to the public realm

7.3 Character Area 3: Oughton Head Way and the green

General description

Oughton Head Way is a gently curving residential street which leads to a small open green area which rises in level and includes a number of mature trees in one corner. The buildings lie on either side of the street, set back with a common building line and small front gardens. Low brick walls and soft planting generally defines these front boundaries. The area has a more tranquil ambiance than Bedford Road and Fishponds Road, although the close proximity of the Samuel Lucas Infants School generates noticeable activity at certain times of the day during term time.

The public realm

The pavements are tarmacadam with narrow concrete or granite kerbs. Taylor's Cottages retain some possibly historic blue brick paviors to the access alleyway. Street lighting is provided by medium height steel or concrete standards. There is an occasional black plastic litter bin. Around the green is a low timber railing on short posts, similar to the railings around Butts Close. A broken timber and concrete bench seat, similar to those in Butts Close, is next to the green, with a black plastic litter bin. Telegraph poles and overhead wires are evident in most of this Character Area.

The buildings

The properties are all two storeys high and are arranged as short terraces or in pairs. They are modestly sized with a 'cottage' character and mainly date to between the 1860s and the end of the 19th century. Whilst all of the houses are built from red or brown brick, many have been painted, usually a white or pastel colour. Pitched slate roofs face the street with prominent stacks which are an important feature in oblique vistas along each stretch of the road. Occasionally a ground floor canted bay window has been added. Nos. 1-3 Oughton Head Way are a well preserved short terrace of three matching cottages which face the junction with Bedford Road – of note are the original windows in Nos. 2 and 3, a rare example of sashes with each sash divided from top to bottom rail into four equal panes. Kent Place is a long terrace of 11 cottages set at an unusual angle to the road and relatively deep front gardens which gives a pleasant setting to this group. One of the properties is dated 1886. There are two notable groups of concealed cottages called Taylors Cottages and Crispin Cottages, both of which are set back at right angles to the street – Taylors Cottages can only be accessed by a narrow alleyway. The only non-residential building is the Sir John Barleycorn Public House, dated 1869, which is painted white with an historic ground-floor build-out which is not obtrusive.



Nos. 1 – 3 Oughton Head Way



Gothic Cottages off Oughton Head Way

Behind the public house facing Gaping Lane is an unusual terrace of five Gothick cottages (nos. 2 - 10 (evens only)) with small front gardens contained by a high brick wall with curved copings. Carved bargeboards to the front gables, pointed arches over each front door, and dentil eaves cornices all provide decoration.

Important views

The only views of any significance are over the green. View 11 takes in the open green area with mature trees in one corner and a horizon formed by a number of 20th century detached houses. Looking back in the opposite direction, View 12 looks down the slight hill to the roofs and gardens which surround the properties which face Oughton Head Way.

Key Negative features

- The broken seat next to the green
- The generally poor quality paving and street lighting
- The brick wall in front of the Gothic houses in Gaping Lane is in need of repair
- Some of the windows have been replaced in uPVC (but a high percentage of original examples also remain)

Issues and opportunities for enhancement

- The protection of the views over the green
- Improvements to the public realm

8 SUMMARY OF ISSUES

These 'Issues' follow the identification of Key Negative Features which are set out in Chapter 7.

8.1 The future management of Butts Close

Butts Close, which is cared for by North Hertfordshire District Council is the principal feature of the Conservation Area and is important to the wider area of Hitchin town. The provision of the two swimming pools and health club on the edges of the park brings frequent visitors to Butts Close who also appreciate the open green spaces, pond and mature trees. The landscape needs to be cared for and the provision of a short Management Plan, to set out priorities and pressures, would be helpful. Improvements to public seating and litter collection would also be welcome.

8.2 The protection of views and open spaces

The most important views within the Conservation Area are noted on the Townscape Appraisal Map, but of course each resident or visitor will have their own favourite view or vista, sometimes little more than a glimpse through a gap in some buildings. The protection or enhancement of these 'glimpses' and pleasant surprises is an important consideration when planning applications are being assessed. Views over open green spaces, trees, and buildings, particularly rooftops, must all be considered when new development is proposed. In the Butts Close, Hitchin Conservation Area, the open green space of Butts Close and Oughton Head Way green must be preserved for future generations. Similarly, the open setting to the locally listed Wilshere-Dacre Junior School must also be protected from unsuitable development.



An example of the use of modern materials (Oughton Head Way)



Kent Place, dated 1886

8.3 The public realm

In several locations within the Conservation Area the poor quality of the public realm is a detrimental feature, and there are clearly issues with poor maintenance and the gradual deterioration of various items of street furniture, particularly public seating. As funds permit, the provision of a standard 'palette' of features (seats, litter bins, street lighting street signage etc) could be adopted by the District and County Councils to ensure that only high quality, well designed features are added.



Oughton Head Way



Nos. 1 – 6 Bedford Street (on left)

8.4 Buildings of Local Interest

North Hertfordshire District Council currently maintains a *Register of Buildings of Local Interest for Hitchin* (BLIs), more commonly referred to as 'locally listed' buildings, many of which lie within the Hitchin Conservation Area. More details are provided in Chapter 6 para. 6.2. The District Council has prepared a revised draft list of BLIs in Hitchin Parish with the assistance of the Hitchin Historical Society. 96 buildings or structures are now included on the Hitchin Parish Local List, three of which lie within the Butts Close, Hitchin Conservation Area. In due course, further additions to this list may be made.

APPENDIX 1: Townscape Appraisal Map

PLANNING GUIDANCE - APPROVED FOR DEVELOPMENT CONTROL PURPOSES

STATEMENT OF CONSULTATION AND PROCESS

4 July 2009	Exhibition launch and 1st round of Public Consultation
4 September 2009	End of 1st round of public consultation
14 May 2010	2nd round of Public Consultation
11 June 2010	End of 2nd round of Public Consultation
14 September 2010	Hitchin Committee
26 July 2011	Cabinet Meeting

In addition, there was local publicity, entry on the District Council's website and letters were sent to various stakeholders, details of which are available from the address below.



If English is not your first language, or you have difficulty reading this document, please ring our customer services team on (01462) 474000 to request it be provided to you in either Urdu, Bengali, Polish, Italian, large print, Braille or on tape.

North Hertfordshire District Council
Council Offices
Gernon Road
Letchworth Garden City
Hertfordshire
SG6 3JF

Tel: Planning Control and Conservation on 01462 474000
Email: planningcontrol@north-herts.gov.uk
Website: www.north-herts.gov.uk