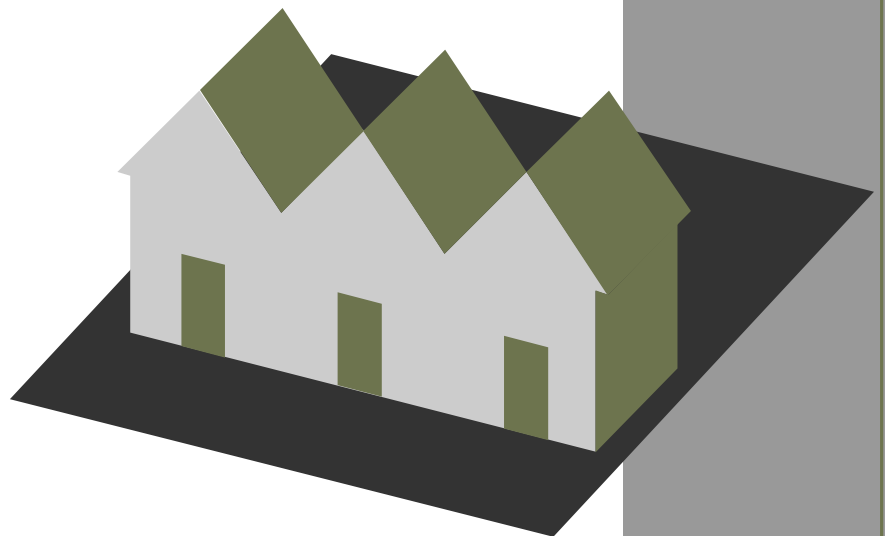




Hitchin Triangle Design Statement

Draft Consultation Document

May 2009



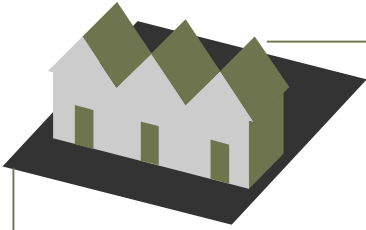


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Introduction

Purpose of document

This draft Design Statement has been prepared and issued for consultation by the Triangle Residents' Association (TRA). It is intended to address two important factors: guidance recently issued by Government on community involvement in the planning process; and the increasing interest in opportunities for development in the area.

The document's principal aim is to provide useful information and guidance for everyone involved in planning or implementing change within the area. This includes local councillors, council officers, prospective developers and the local community. The document identifies the existing features, buildings, facilities and aspects of streetscape that are important to residents living in this area and help establish its distinct local character. The document is proactive in offering guidelines on key factors for consideration in new development, details of design features that could be incorporated into such development, and how highway and transport provision can enhance the local quality of life.

The Association's intention is that the guidelines set out will form the basis against which changes and new development may be considered. Thus the document will provide assistance in determining new development applications in the area to North Hertfordshire District Council as the agreed Design Statement for the Triangle area. It would thus become an important material consideration in determining planning applications within the Triangle area and in decisions on related matters, including conservation of buildings and provision of highways and transport.

The draft Design Statement is supported by two other documents, setting out information and guidance in more detail:

- Building Design and Conservation
- Transport and Liveable Streets

Aspirations

The aspirations of Triangle Residents Association are summarised as follows:

1. To enable to the local community to influence and shape the future development of the Triangle and ensure that development strengthens the community.
2. To record the distinctive features which contribute to the local character and to conserve the historic fabric of the area.
3. To protect and enhance our local parks, allotments, wildlife, trees and green spaces.
4. To encourage local businesses and promote the local economy.
5. To improve the infrastructure and community facilities.
6. To encourage development that befits a mixed-use, centrally located urban setting and encourage high quality development of aesthetic merit.
7. To create cleaner, safer more lovable streets that are less dominated by motor-vehicles and provide a friendly environment for people to walk, cycle and play.

Responsibility for document

This draft Design Statement is based on an original draft produced by local residents working within the Triangle Residents' Association (TRA). It has been edited for use as a consultation document by an independent consultant in transport and urban planning working under the direction of the Association's Committee. North Hertfordshire District Council's Planning Department has provided assistance with graphics and has printed the documents for circulation.

Authorship of the two supporting documents was:

- Building Design and Conservation - local residents working within the Triangle Residents' Association (TRA)
- Transport and Liveable Streets – an independent consultant in transport and urban planning

Information used in this report has been drawn largely from a Community Survey (2003) and observations carried out by members of the Association and through discussions with the area's residents. Key data have been drawn from the 2001 Census, using information for the North Hertfordshire Area 010A (this is somewhat larger than the Triangle area but all of it appeared to be essentially of the same characteristics as the Triangle).

Processes

Consultation on this draft Design Statement is being carried out locally during the month of June 2009. A copy of the document is being provided to every household resident in the area and to every business in the area. Copies of the two supporting documents are being supplied on request, either in printed format or electronically. Copies of all documents are available for reference or downloading on the Association's Internet site <http://www.hitchintriangle.org/>. The consultation documents are available to other interested people and organisations.

The consultation process will include the opportunity for local residents and businesses to let the Committee know what they think about the information and draft guidelines set out in the draft Design Statement. This can be done by writing or emailing to the Association Secretary or by talking to any member of the Association's Committee. The leaflet being issued with copies of this document will set out details.

There will also be two opportunities to find out more and express views in public:

- At an open public meeting to be held by the Association on the evening of Monday 8 June at Holy Saviour Church Hall, Radcliffe Road, Hitchin at 7.30 p.m.
- At the Triangle Community Garden Open Day, Ransoms Recreation Ground, Hitchin, on Sunday 28 June, where the Association will have a display and information stand from 2pm-5pm.

Officers from the District Council's Planning Department and the Association's consultant will join members of the Association's Committee at both events.

After the close of the consultation period, the draft document will be edited to incorporate the information and views provided by residents and other consultees. It will then be submitted to North Hertfordshire District Council for adoption as their formal guidance for the Triangle area. Once formally adopted, the Design statement will be printed and published, and a copy will be supplied to every local household and business.



History and current situation

Area covered

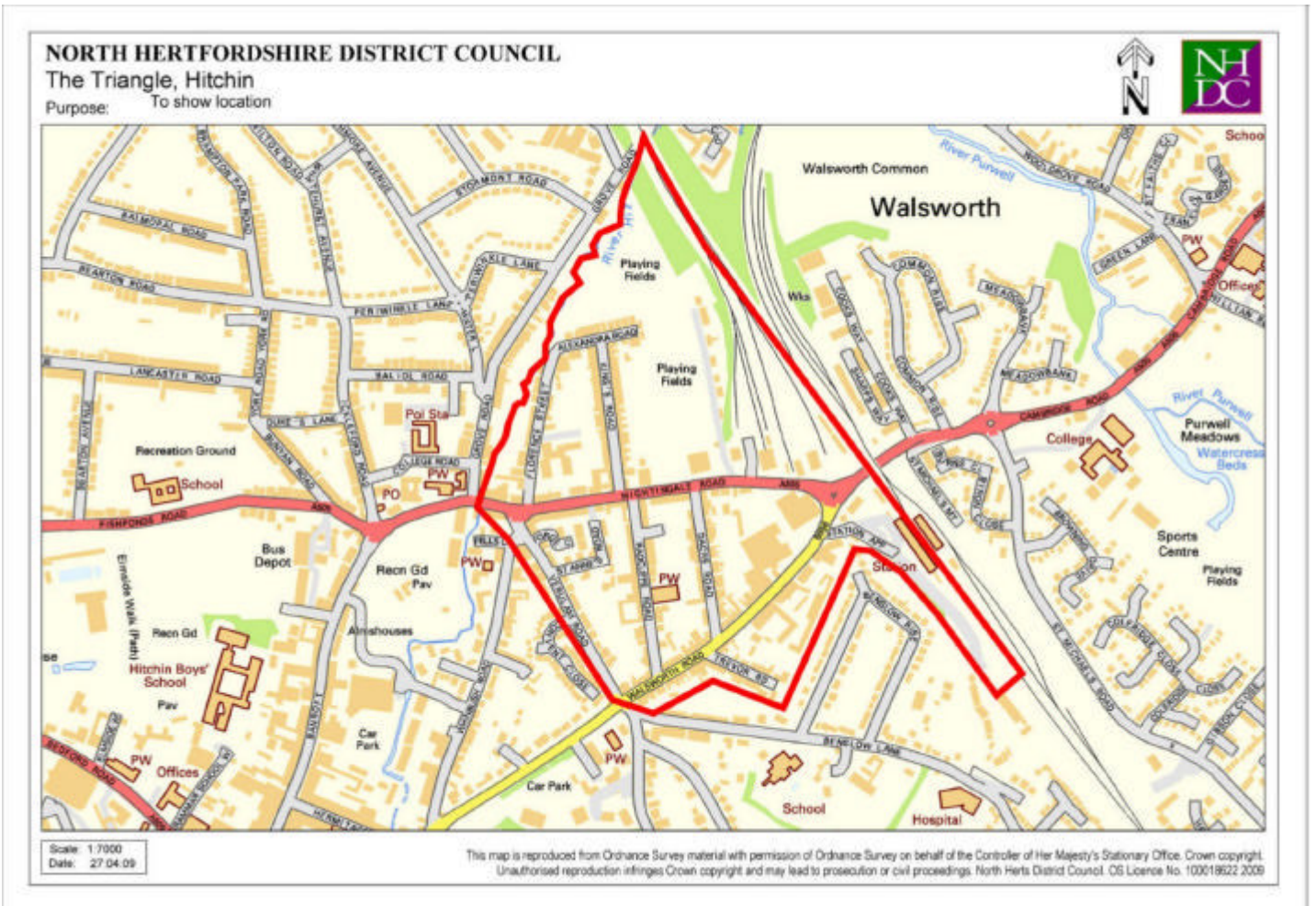
The Triangle forms an area of land between the East Coast Main Line railway, the River Hiz, Verulam Road and Walsworth Road/Burtons Path. Boundary markers are the railway bridges, a road bridge over the Hiz, a roundabout and a well-used footpath. The area sits between the town centre and the busy Hitchin Rail Station and looks to both as focal points of activities and movement.

The key boundary points are as follows:

- Westernmost point - Starlings Bridge where Nightingale Road (A505) crosses the River Hiz near Grove Road. The North West boundary follows the south east bank of the River Hiz from Starlings Bridge as far as the East Coast Main Line where the river and railway meet at Grove Road (ECML bridge103)
- Northernmost point - Grove Road at ECML 103. The North East boundary follows the East Coast Main Line of the railway south east to Hitchin Station from bridge ECML103 to ECML102. The Triangle area thus includes Ransoms Recreation Ground (incorporating the Triangle Community Garden), Midland Cottages, railway goods yards off Nightingale Road, the restricted height railway bridge (ECML 102) at Cambridge Road immediately north west of the station and all of the road junction of the A505 and B656.
- Easternmost Point - Hitchin Railway Station. The railway line from the ECML102 bridge as far as the extreme end of the Station Car Park and Station Approach. This includes: rail station ticket office and buildings on the down side, the rail station forecourt including bus stops, taxi rank, disabled car park, cycle parking and car park, industrial and other development along the full length of Station Approach, the bank of mature trees bordering Benslow Rise. This area includes the Victorian buildings at the railway station site: the ticket office and adjacent railway buildings, former stationmaster's house: Bytham Bank, adjacent terrace of railway cottages, and Station Lodge and Beech House across the forecourt.
- Southernmost Point - 110 Walsworth Road at the roundabout on Verulam Road/Walsworth Road. The boundary line next runs across Walsworth Road, along the western side of Verulam Road to along the rear of No. 35 to Club85 and across Whinbush Road and down Fells Close to the River Hiz and back to Starlings Bridge. Convent Close is not included in the Triangle Area.

The defined area is shown in the Map.

The Hitchin Triangle



Historical Development

The area to the east and north of the historic centre of Hitchin was not built up until the middle of the 19th century. Prior to this, similar fertile areas on the edge of settlements were cultivated as market gardens to provide food for the population.

The coming of the railway

The major influence was the coming of the Great Northern Railway to Hitchin. This led to a profound change in the fortunes of the town. The site selected for the station was determined by the route taken by the line in passing through the Hitchin Gap in the Chiltern Hills. A route passing closer to the western side of the town could have been chosen but was resisted by influential residents. The present location nearly three quarters of a mile from the centre of the town invited development, much of it required to house the increasing number of railway employees. Thus was the area of mixed residential and commercial uses established, while Hitchin became an important junction on what is now known as the East Coast Main Line from London. As the town expanded and local market gardens were taken over for housing, food was more easily imported by rail from London markets.

Emergence of business and commerce

The burgeoning population of the rapidly developing area demanded shops and services close at hand. Both the main road arteries between the town and the railway station, Nightingale Road and Walsworth Road, attracted retailers anxious to serve the expanding population. Butchers, bakers, grocers and no doubt candlestick makers, quickly established themselves, while several public houses provided refreshment.

The new workforce was not only employed on the railway. Ancillary trades took advantage of the newly emerging commercial growth, Bowman's Mill, Sanders Coach Works and latterly George W King, Engineers, and the Bacon Factory. Other more ambitious possibilities might have come Hitchin's way. Industrial development was proposed for the wider Walsworth area, while one of the railway companies considered establishing a major railway workshop at Hitchin at the junction of the Great Northern and Midland Railways and the branch to Cambridge.

The Gainsford Buildings

As a direct result of the development of the Triangle area to meet the demands made by the arrival of the railway in the mid 19th century, the Reverend George Gainsford, who had originally come to the town as Curate of St Mary's Church, took it upon himself to provide for the spiritual needs of the expanding



population by founding Holy Saviour Church in Radcliffe Road. His concern was not confined to the spiritual. Following the consecration of the church in 1864 he went on to organise the building of a school which he designed himself, an orphanage (St Bridgets in Radcliffe Road), a close of Alms Houses which are still in use, as well as several other

properties in Verulam Road for staff and family. Holy Saviour Church is believed to have been designed by the eminent Victorian architect, William Butterfield and is currently a grade II listed building.

Description of the Area

Essentially the Triangle area consists of three main roads making up the triangle, two streets across the area and a number of minor streets and closes. Most of it consists of houses, with some small blocks of flats, and some shops and small businesses. Much of it was built during the nineteenth century but with some of more recent construction. At the east end, close to the railway station, there are some new developments, mostly of flats but with some offices; further developments of this type may be proposed for unused commercial sites.

Walsworth Road

Walsworth Road forms the south eastern edge of the triangle. It provides a main route into Hitchin from the east and access to the railway station. It forms an important artery for traffic, which is calmed only by pedestrian crossings at each end of the road. In the section within the Triangle area, the street scene benefits from mature trees at the front of Rose Cottage Gardens, mature lime trees at crossing by the former B&Q site and a copper beech outside Lyon Court, in addition to beech and horse chestnut trees on the bank opposite and to the rear of the Station. With single yellow lines the full length of the road, a number of the small front gardens have been converted into parking spaces. The west end of the section of the road within the Triangle is marked by a mini-roundabout where Walsworth Road continues and is joined by Highbury Road and Verulam Road.

Walsworth Road is a mixed residential and commercial environment of largely Victorian brick buildings, many with bays and gabled attic rooms, interspersed by new flats of indifferent character and quality. Most buildings except recent blocks of flats are of 19th or early 20th century construction, in dark red brick, with slate roofing and sash windows. There is a number of shops, mostly along the north side of the road, as well as a café, a mason's yard and some other commercial premises.



Nightingale Road

Nightingale Road forms the northern edge of the Triangle. It too provides a main route into Hitchin from the east. It also forms an important artery for traffic, which is calmed only by pedestrian crossings at each end of the road and in the centre. There are fine mature lime trees and a large poplar at the entrance to Ransoms Recreation Ground, a mature lime in the garden of 1 Radcliffe Road and limes, rowan, birch sycamore, horse chestnut and conifers by the pavement on the former B&Q site. There are also a few smaller trees of various species along the banks leading to the railway bridge. Some hedgerow remains in the amenity carpark at the Recreation Ground. Double yellow lines run the full length of



the road. Gardens are mostly too small to provide off-road parking spaces. The west end of the section of the road within the Triangle is marked by a mini-roundabout where Nightingale Road continues and is joined by Verulam Road, Whinbush Road and Florence Street.

The western and central sections of Nightingale Road within the Triangle have mixed residential and commercial environment of largely Victorian brick buildings, also mostly of 19th or early 20th century construction, in dark red brick, with slate roofing and sash windows. There is a number of shops, restaurants and takeaways at this end, on both sides of the road. The eastern end is dominated by industrial and retail premises, some of them unused.

Verulam Road

Verulam Road forms the western edge of the triangle. It has a mix of houses, including a good number of attractive Victorian properties. There are also a number of 1960s and 1970s properties, especially in the two closes leading off the road. A small commercial site has recently been converted to residential use and a bungalow replaced by a small terrace of houses. There are no commercial premises. The road also conveys substantial local traffic. There are roundabouts at both ends. There is a mixture of parking restrictions.

Radcliffe Road

This road runs across the area between Nightingale and Walsworth Roads. It is essentially a residential road, of two storey houses, mostly in terraced groups. Many of these blocks are Victorian in origin, but there are also some modern blocks dating from the 1960s and 1980s. Holy Saviour Church is at the south end, with the other Gainsford buildings adjacent. There are no commercial premises on Radcliffe Road, except for the small retail store on the corner at the junction with Walsworth Road. There is a mix of mature and new street trees.



Dacre Road

Dacre Road lies to the east of Radcliffe Road and runs parallel to it. It too is essentially a residential road, of two storey houses, both Victorian and some modern groups. There are no commercial premises. There is a mix of mature and new street trees.

Dacre and Radcliffe Road ‘in between lands’

These spaces are a mixture of NHDC and North Herts Homes land, giving rear access to housing and mostly used for car parking. There is a large willow in one of the parking areas. Behind the rear boundary wall of Holy Saviour Church is a small children’s play area with seating, grass and shrubs. The play area is not heavily used, but has the advantage of being accessible to families with small children within the Dacre/Radcliffe



area without crossing main roads. Although the parking spaces are well-used, the area attracts litter, fly-tipping and occasional antisocial behaviour. NHDC has offered to support any group interested in setting up a community garden project in the play area.

Other closes and backs

There are number of minor roads and other open spaces within the triangle of the three main roads, leading off them or off Dacre or Radcliffe Roads. The minor roads include St Annes Road, St Annes Court, Forge Close, Nightingale Court and Garden Row. All of these except the last have been developed in recent years on formerly vacant land or unused commercial premises. There are also open spaces behind Radcliffe Road on the east side giving access to the rear of some houses on Radcliffe Road itself and also on Nightingale Road. This area is used extensively for parking but is generally unkempt.

Trevor Road

Trevor Road rises from Walsworth Road up into Highbury, with the two properties at the top backing onto Burton's Path. The street contains a mixture of large four storey and smaller two storey Victorian terraces with one large detached villa. Modern additions from recent decades include a small terrace and a detached house. The earliest buildings on the street were built in connection with the Hitchin Baptist movement. Before the Walsworth Road Baptist Church was founded, there was a small Baptist chapel attached to Trevor House at number 7.

Florence Street and Kings Road

These two roads on the north side of Nightingale Road form part of the Triangle community. Like Dacre Road they are essentially residential roads, of two storey houses, mostly of Victorian houses but with a few modern dwellings. Florence Street also contains the Hitchin Mosque and Anderson House a sheltered housing scheme.

Midland Cottages

Midland Cottages are 18 or so houses in a private no-through road off the north side of Nightingale Road, between the railway embankment and Ransom's Recreation Ground. They are all of two storeys and on one side of the lane, facing the recreation ground. Most date from the 1850s with others of sympathetic design built in recent years.

Small areas of largely similar character lie to the south and west. In many ways their characteristics and activity patterns match the Triangle area.

Key Local Facilities

Ransom's Recreation Ground

This is a large open park area on the north side of the Triangle, reached via a pedestrian-controlled crossing of Nightingale Road. It provides green space, a football pitch, children's play area and a community garden. It is the only community open space in this part of Hitchin and thus provides a vital amenity space in an otherwise relatively highly built up area. The park is used by many people to walk dogs and by many local clubs and societies including scouts, football clubs, BMX bikers and the community garden. It offers a key facility for a broad range of age groups and communities in the area. There are mature limes, poplars and willows, with some hedgerow important for wildlife. At least two species of bats are regularly seen in the park.



Allotments

Ransom's allotments site is one of four sites in Hitchin and is unique in being the only one that is within the urban area rather than on the fringes of the town. It is particularly important for the local community and a large proportion of tenants live within walking distance. The allotments have been consistently well used, with a waiting list for new plot owners over the last 20 years. They provide an important amenity that offers allotment holders health benefits through the exercise of allotment tending, including reduction of stress levels, and, the advantages that come with a supply of fresh (and organic) fruit and vegetables. The site benefits from the natural surveillance by park users and by occupants of the homes in Kings Road that back onto the site. It is bounded by pollarded limes, some large ash trees and native hedgerow. Owls have been observed at the site.

Faith Centres

There are five places of worship in or adjacent to the area: three Christian churches, a Spiritualist church and a Mosque.

Public Houses

The area is very well served by public houses with five currently trading.



Retail, Shopping and Commercial

The area contains a significant number of retail and business uses, providing facilities to people living in the area. These include about a dozen retailers, a dozen cafes and take-aways, a number of motor repair outlets and a few other services. Specialist firms include a world class woodwind and brass instrument retailer and repairer, a ladies motorcycle clothing retailer and a range of IT and marketing related consultancies.



Many are locally owned independent stores constituting a local economy; but the use of these in the area is under threat from larger national and multi-national chains and out-of-town shopping. In the past ten years many shops have closed or been converted to residential use. If this trend continues,

there will be in a loss of amenity for residents living in the area. So measures to try to halt or reverse the decline in local retail facilities are encouraged.

Other factors

The area benefits from some neighbouring facilities. These include

- North Herts College, situated on the eastern (Letchworth) side of the town some half a kilometre from the Triangle, is a centre for adult and community learning, with other sites at Letchworth and Stevenage. The College location suits students from the Triangle area of Hitchin and provide an opportunity for local residents to widen their skills for leisure and career purposes.
- Hitchin Boy's Schools and Hitchin Girl's School are single sex comprehensive schools with premises close to the town centre. High academic standards are maintained with a healthy mix of pupils of differing ethnic origins. Places in both schools are valued by parents and residents of the Triangle area are well placed in terms of catchment area in both cases.
- Hitchin Town Centre is a compact and traditional town centre within easy walking distance for residents in the Triangle area.
- Hitchin Railway Station interchange provides public transport access to London, Cambridge, Peterborough, with coach links to regional airports and the Midlands.

Because the Triangle area is situated between the rail station and Hitchin Town Centre, Nightingale Road and Walsworth Road both experience significant pedestrian movement through the area as a result. This benefits the local night-time economy but also raises issues such as crime and litter.

Development

The area's activities and residents

As outlined in the previous section, the Hitchin Triangle is a mostly residential area but also benefits from a range of local services and industries. Its location is significant in terms of activity patterns and residential occupation, lying as it does between Hitchin railway station at the east end, served by trains on the outer suburban services between London and Cambridge or Peterborough, and Hitchin town centre about 500 metres to the west. The town centre contains a substantial number of retail and service outlets, and also acts as a nodal point for bus services providing links to the surrounding areas. Thus the Triangle rates very highly in terms of local and wider access for its residents.

From the 2001 Census data (for North Hertfordshire Area 010A), the following main points about the area's activities and population can be identified:

- The proportion of full time employed among residents aged 16-74, at 51%, is higher than the District (46%) or County (42%) figures. But the number of retired people, at 8%, is much lower than District or County (13% and 14%).
- The proportion of properties owned by their occupier, at 48%, is much lower than for District (68%) or County (72%). 51% is rented, compared to much lower figures for District or County; of particular note, 21% is rented from a private landlord.
- Average occupancy, as shown by persons per room, is slightly higher than for the District.
- Car ownership for the area is 86 per 100 households, very much lower than for the District (130 cars per 100 households).

Since the 2001 Census some new blocks of flats have been built and occupied and further large developments are now in course of completion, within the planning process or understood to be under consideration. The replacement of some industry and retail by new flats is probably influenced strongly by the adjacent railway station, from which it is easy to commute to London, and also to Cambridge or to some other main centres in Hertfordshire. The relative closeness to the town centre is no doubt also a factor. These new developments are valuable to the extent that they reinforce the character of the area as one of high population density geared to local access and lower use of car travel.

New development – issues and opportunities

With its high density of occupation, low level of car ownership and continuing attraction for residential development, the Triangle area clearly demonstrates the potential to meet national aims for developing sustainable communities. For these reasons it seems appropriate for the area to have priority for suitable development if such policies are to be pursued in North Hertfordshire. However, development has to be designed and located in ways that enhance the attractiveness for residents and for local service providers too.

This section sets out policy guidelines for new development proposals. However, these must be complemented by measures to retain the area's specific features and reduce

negative effects. These are covered in the next two sections, on building design and conservation and on transport and liveable streets.

Guidance on new development

The following are a general set of principles that should be applied to new build in the area:

1. New developments should conform with the existing context in terms of height and massing. The existing context is predominantly defined by medium density two or three storey housing. Buildings should not exceed this context unless they are of outstanding design and have tangible local support.
2. New development should take account of slopes, changing elevations, and views of the site, both near and distant.
3. New buildings should be distinctive whilst still integrating with the existing architecture. Distinctiveness can be achieved by creative use of roof design, by window style and arrangement and by decorative treatment of walls and entrances. Schemes that fail to add distinctiveness and interest to the area should be refused planning permission.
4. New developments should be of aesthetic merit. They should demonstrate creativity and artistry in the design and should contribute positively to the street-scene. Where buildings are particularly prominent or in visually important locations the design should receive tangible local support.



5. The design and materials used in new developments should respect the Victorian domestic and industrial heritage that is an important characteristic of the area.
6. The design of new building should aim to minimise the possibility or impact of crime, through the careful placement of buildings, walkways, entrances and lighting. But the building of gated developments closed to the general public should be avoided as this can potentially lead to social exclusion.
7. New development should, through its layout and design, support easy access and high quality streetscapes in the area. Priority should be given in its design for movement on foot and by bicycle, and for easy access to public transport stops.
8. New development should provide levels of parking facilities appropriate for a densely occupied and easily accessible urban area. It should not be predominated by aspects relating to car parking and the motor car and should include cycle and motorbike spaces.



9. New development should preserve existing mature trees and should add new trees where possible. Planting and landscaping should be an important consideration when designing new schemes within the area.
10. New developments should be designed to achieve high levels of energy efficiency and water conservation.
11. New developments of a significant size should provide additional facilities for the areas' residents. Examples might include day-care nurseries, recycling facilities, community centre or allotments.
12. The design of lighting schemes for new developments should not result in excessive light pollution.

Building design

Building design in the area

The character of the Triangle area is defined by the Victorian origin of the majority of its buildings.

The area now known as "The Triangle" was developed in the latter half of the nineteenth century following the arrival of the Great Northern Railway a mile or so from the historic centre of the old market town of Hitchin. As a result the area between the new railway station and the town became a grid of streets of terraced houses to accommodate the workers needed to run the railway and to serve the rapidly increasing population of the town. This in turn attracted those such as the Rev George Gainsford with an interest in caring for the spiritual needs of the burgeoning population. He established Holy Saviour Church in Radcliffe Road.



Much of the original layout of the Triangle area remains, convenient for town and railway station. Although the site of many shops and other businesses have long since changed, the best indication of the past history of the area still lies in its surviving Victorian buildings, many of which continue to provide comfortable and convenient family accommodation. The purpose of this Design Statement is to draw attention to this legacy of historic buildings and to emphasize the importance of their conservation and preservation so that the essential character of the area is maintained.

There will always be pressure to re-develop urban areas seen as run down and out of date. It is for this reason that the emphasis in the Triangle area has to be on the conservation of existing buildings of worth and on the enhancement of open spaces. In this way the essential character of the area is maintained and any redevelopment which is seen as the preferred option for particular locations is done in a way that recognizes this essential character.

In order to provide guidance a section of the guide has been prepared on High Quality Design which points out aspects of building design appropriate to this part of Hitchin.

Locally significant buildings

There is quite a number of buildings in the area which make a particular contribution to the overall historic character of the area. The conservation of these buildings should be given extra weight when new development or changes to streetscape are under consideration.

Nightingale Road

- Leicester Cottages (92-95) – a set of 1850s cottages
- Nightingale Public House – formerly the Leicester Railway Inn

- Midland Cottages – a set of 1850s Victorian cottages built for Midland Railway employees
- The Orchard and Anvil Public House – built 1840, formerly the Woolpack
- Nos. 50-56 – a group of several traditional shops and two of the oldest houses in the area
- Nos. 50 – 1901, the first Co-op market in the area
- Nos. 53-54 – a pair of cottages built in 1844
- No. 56 - built around 1905
- Nos. 51, 52, 55 – traditional shop frontages
- The Railway Warehouse and Outbuildings - the last remaining rail warehouse in the area

Walsworth Road

- No.32 - a fine example of vibrant Victorian polychrome brick work from the 1860s
- No. 47 – constructed entirely from concrete, a very early example and the only such building in the area
- No.50A Walsworth Road - a large and prominent traditional shop front, the only one of its type in Hitchin, with labyrinthine cellars and warehouse buildings at the rear
- No 110 - original home of the Jeeves family, builders of many properties in the area
- Sanders Coachworks – one of the very first manufacturers of motor cars in the country
- The Station Master's House – built 1911
- Former Signal Building
- Great Northern Cottages – row of rendered cottages built about 1850

Trevor Road

- Nos.5-7 – an attractive terrace of four storey houses, in Arlesey white bricks with original windows and slate roofs – 7 Trevor House formerly had a private chapel attached, now demolished

Dacre Road

- No.58 – a decorative late Victorian building with unusual decorative brick work
- The Albert Public House – formerly the Prince Albert, dating from around 1860

Radcliffe Road

- Holy Saviour Church – designed by William Butterfield and built for George Gainsford - consecrated 25 May 1865
- St Saviours Alms Houses – built 1869 for George Gainsford, locally known as 'The Cloisters'
- Former St Bridget's orphanage - built 1873 for George Gainsford
- Former St. Saviour's school – built 1872 for George Gainsford, latterly a Sikh Gurdwara, now a private house

Verulam Road

- No. 17 – formerly the Vicarage for Holy Saviour church
- Nos. 18 / 18a / 19 / 20 – all 1860s, built for George Gainsford

Guidance on building design and conservation

The character provided by the historic buildings within the area is highly valued by its residents. The historic fabric provides a sense of stability and belonging that helps bind the community together and is attractive to new residents looking to live within Hitchin. Future development in the designated area should enhance and protect the historic character. In particular:

- The existing stock of historic buildings should be conserved in future development decisions. Demolition of historic buildings erodes the historic fabric and should only be allowed under exceptional circumstances.
- Modification or alteration of the exterior of historic buildings should preserve or enhance the existing historic character of that building.
- The demolition of buildings, walls and structures which are important to the visual quality and historic integrity of the area should be strongly resisted.
- Any development proposal should respect and reflect the visual quality of the area because of its design, materials, colour, form and scale.
- Any development proposal should enhance and contribute to open spaces important to the appearance or historic character of the area.
- Gardens associated with historic buildings form an important part of the character and provide valuable amenity space. New-build development on existing garden space should be strongly resisted.
- Neglected urban spaces are often rich in wildlife, especially near corridors such as the railway. Ecological surveys are strongly recommended when any development is proposed, especially on lightly or un-managed sites.
- There should be a presumption that all trees and native hedges, will be protected.
- The presence of traditional shops and shop frontages forms an important part of the historical character of the area and their loss should be resisted.

Practical Guidance on Caring for Old Buildings

Maintenance of old buildings can be expensive and not all households can afford to follow the best practice advice set out below. However, avoiding simple mistakes when working with old materials can save substantial costs in 'failed repairs'. Property value is reduced by neglecting the historic features of old buildings. This section's purpose is to alert interested parties to a range of recommendations with benefit to householders and heritage-lovers alike.

The picture below shows two identical cottages dating from around 1900. The cottage on the right is almost in original condition with recessed doorway, slate roof and chimney-stack. The bay window is intact with original tiles and, fretted decoration and sash window frames. The red-brown windows and cream sash windows are typical of an original paint scheme for the period of this house. The fact that the features are so well preserved is quite unusual but helps to demonstrate the significant character and visual appeal that these simple cottages can possess.



The identical cottage on the left, has in contrast received significant and unsympathetic modernisation. The bay has been removed and original sashes replaced with low-cost plastic double glazed windows. The recessed entrance has been brought forward and fitted with a modern plastic door. Despite these changes being in many ways practical, much of the original visual appeal of the property has been lost.

Although this particular example is not important in itself, poor and unsympathetic building care can have a dramatic effect on the appearance and character of an area when extended across a number of properties. The result can be to change an area from appearing attractive and well maintained to looking shabby and neglected. In the extreme, poor building care can undermine the viability of a whole area helping start a cycle of decline. To reduce the risk of this, the Appendix on Design & Conservation provides practical guidance of caring for old and historic buildings. The aim is to improve the overall appearance of the area, however applying the points detailed may also help to improve saleability and value of an individual property or increase the value of properties within a road.



Transport and liveable streets

Transport in the area and its impact

Transport in and around the Hitchin Triangle area is very heavily influenced by its location, between the railway station at the west end and the town centre some 500 metres to the east. The railway station, served by trains on the outer suburban services between London and Cambridge or Peterborough, offers easy commuting to London, and also to Cambridge or to some other main centres in Hertfordshire. The town centre, as well as offering a wide range of commercial services, is also a nodal point for bus services offering links to the surrounding areas, some of which run along the roads edging the Triangle. Thus the Triangle rates very highly in terms of access for its residents to a range of shops and services and to direct public transport services.

From the 2001 Census data (for North Hertfordshire Area 010A), two interesting measures of transport emerge that bear out the image of public transport use being higher and car use being much lower:

- For travel to work, 15% use the train and 15% walk, compared to 9% and 10% respectively for the District. Only 51% travel to work by car compared to 65% for the District.
- Car ownership for the area is 86 per 100 households, very much lower than for the District (130 cars per 100 households).

However, the area's location also has a negative influence. Because it is so close to the railway and also close to the town centre, it is affected by substantial levels of through movement. This includes pedestrians, from within the Triangle and further afield, walking to and from the station at peak times and to the town centre at all times. More obviously it suffers from substantial levels of traffic on the roads surrounding it; especially east-west traffic on Nightingale and Walsworth Roads. These negative elements reflect a continuing general growth in use of motor vehicles; and the decline in quality of travel by other means. It is very difficult to say how far the trends reflect 'pull' factors, such as the sheer attraction and convenience of car use, or 'push' factors, such as the run down in the quality of footways and bus services, coupled with the attraction of larger commercial units elsewhere in the town and beyond it which may bring some loss of local facilities and services.



It follows that solutions to these interrelated problems are essential to achieving in practice the policy aims of sustainable transport and communities. While these problems can be identified under individual categories, their solution demands a cohesive and carefully articulated programme of action.

Access and movement – issues and opportunities

There are serious issues with a number of aspects of transport. The following paragraphs set these out briefly for each main means of travel, looking at the nature of issues and the implications for quality of life in the area.

Walking

Walking conditions in the immediate area are poor. Despite some limited instances of good conditions but there is no consistent high quality footway network within or beyond the area. Various problems can be identified which complement each other in making walking inefficient, uncomfortable and potentially dangerous. Even though people may get used to these conditions, because they have to, it is unlikely that trips on foot are as readily undertaken as they might be, especially where people have a choice.

Specific problems include:

- Pavements which in some places are too narrow for people to pass comfortably.
- The closeness to heavy and sometimes fast moving traffic, which makes walking uncomfortable and potentially hazardous.
- Blockages of pavements by fixed structures, by vehicles parked on the pavement and by such things as street signs, retailers' signboards and wheelie bins.
- Poor and sometimes hazardous conditions, due to insufficient maintenance.
- Bicycles ridden on the pavement.
- Crossing the main roads can be frightening and potentially hazardous because of the volume and speed of traffic.



These problems affect both local people and others walking through the area. They particularly affect children, older people and less mobile people. They also impact on people pushing a wheeled object, such as a pushchair, a wheelchair or a wheeled shopping trolley. Good walking conditions are essential to maintain a sound and cohesive community, keeping shops viable, preserving good access to local services and maintaining security and neighbourliness.

Cycling

Although cycling is a potentially useful means of travel for shorter distances, cycling levels in Hitchin are currently very low, about 3% of journeys. The main reason appears to be the potentially hazardous nature of cycling, especially along the main roads, coupled with the relatively limited width of even the main roads. Some cyclists take to the pavements, adding to problems for pedestrians. Apart from the railway station there are no cycle parking facilities in the area.



Bus services

Bus services are important for local residents for two reasons. First, they enable those without a car to go further afield. Second, if people from further afield use the bus to reach the town centre of the railway station, car travel through the area is reduced. However, bus services at present are generally unattractive for several reasons:



- Buses suffer delays from traffic congestion and are thus seen as unreliable. There are virtually no bus priorities in the area to improve reliability.
- Services are run largely on a piecemeal basis rather than as a single travel network for the area.
- The only tickets usually available are individual journey tickets, which have to be bought on boarding the bus.
- Information is available only on a piecemeal basis.

The railway station

Hitchin railway station forms an important focus for the town and is valuable for Triangle residents, providing services on the corridor between London, Cambridge and Peterborough. While the forecourt and parking areas have been improved over time, there are still difficulties in getting to and from it. This is particularly so for pedestrians, who have only one crossing over Walsworth Road and narrow pavements on the approach. Local bus routes operate in and out of the forecourt to serve the station directly, but this does increase travel time on through routes. Long distance coach services to London's airports, Cambridge and the Midlands also stop at the station.



The narrow underline bridge conveying the A505 poses serious questions for people living east of the railway line. The pavement along it is particularly narrow and very unpleasant to walk along because of the closeness, noise and emissions of road traffic.

Parking

Parking in the area has increasingly formed a major issue for residents and local businesses, for a number of reasons. The problems have been significantly reduced for most people by the residents parking scheme introduced in February 2009, but some issues remain. These include:



- The large proportion of residents' cars parked on the street in the evenings and at weekends, with car ownership levels probably still increasing from their relatively low level.
- The substantial restrictions on parking on the main roads. This leads to parking on forecourts and pavements causing dangerous obstructions.
- Lack of supervision of the publicly accessible land available for parking, notably between Dacre and Radcliffe Roads.

- Limited short term spaces available for deliveries and customers' parking for the shops and other businesses (though the recent changes have helped ease this situation).

Traffic and highway provision

Because of its location, the area suffers from heavy traffic through it. This is present most times of the week but is especially heavy at peak times, when congestion can occur. Nightingale Road and Walsworth Road form the main east – west arteries, while Verulam Road also serves as an important through route. The high traffic levels bring noise and air pollution, enough in itself to lower the quality of life. But the constant traffic also raises the discomfort of walking, makes cycling dangerous and reduces the links between residents in different parts of the neighbourhood. This applies equally to the Triangle area itself and to adjacent areas.

Some of the traffic is undoubtedly over longer distances, in some cases not serving Hitchin at all. But, as national data show, most car journeys are short, and a high proportion of car travel through the area is undoubtedly local. Heavy lorries (HGVs) carrying freight traffic make up a proportion of traffic, especially on Nightingale Road, and some of these are also local. They include uncovered HGVs carrying scrap metal operating between two local sites.



The local road pattern mostly reflects the area's development over time, especially during the Victorian period. Modern renewal work has generally aimed at improving safety, capacity and efficiency, especially for vehicle movement. There has not been any wholesale review of what the strategic transport objectives might be and hence what should be the priorities for roadworks. This explains, for example, the poor state of many footways and the continuing high levels of traffic throughout the area.

Transport aspects of new development

The new development at the east end of the area (mostly blocks of flats only partly completed at time of writing) offers both an opportunity and a threat. If it increases local activity levels, including support for local businesses and community life, then it is to be welcomed. If however it adds to the scale of local traffic and the problems that this brings, then it offers a serious threat. It is particularly vital that this should be taken into account in local development planning.

Guidance on access and movement

The following approach to a transport solution for the area is recommended.

Priorities

Three specific priorities are suggested, in order, as:

- 1 Achieve comfortable and easy walking throughout and beyond the area.
- 2 Reduce vehicle traffic and provide for its management, with clear and effective provision for cycling and for bus and taxi services.
- 3 Manage parking of vehicles.

Overall strategy

An overall strategy should be defined and implemented, as part of a strategy for Hitchin and beyond. This should be developed through the Hitchin Urban Transport Plan in ways sensitive to local residential and business needs and incorporated in the Local Transport Plan and the Local Development Framework as a clear focus for implementation. The strategy would include the following main components applied in a cohesive fashion:

- Maintain Nightingale Road as the main through road for the area (A505) but with review of layout through the area.
- Redefine Walsworth Road as a purely local road, enabling major changes (in line with Manual for Streets) to fit it as a designed and controlled local road with wider pavements and more crossings, on street parking and priority for cyclists and buses. Make radical changes to the layout at the railway bridge junction and to the station entrance, focused on greatly improving pedestrian, cycle and bus access.
- Upgrade the quality of pavements and footways throughout the area, through a defined strategy incorporating people oriented design and high quality. Particular attention should be paid to providing continuous and comfortable walking conditions. This should include crossing points at road junctions.
- Develop and implement the emerging NHDC cycle strategy, through design and provision of priority routes.
- Investigate and install bus priority measures, especially at the main junctions in the area. Install much better bus boarding points. These actions should form part of a strategy for buses in North Hertfordshire which should aim for a step change in quality through much higher quality in operations, vehicles and information.
- Establish a proper system for the long term management of traffic in the area.
- Establish a proper system for the long term maintenance of roads, footways, parking spaces and other features throughout the area.
- Establish a proper system for the long term management of parking in the area, including motorcycle and bicycle parking provision, parking standards for new developments and the one public car park and three Controlled Parking Zones in operation.

Hitchin Triangle Design Statement
Draft Consultation Document

