# December Parish News

## Notes from Gernon Road

The budget setting process has begun. Savings will have to be made again this year, not least because we are facing the reality of a negative Revenue Support Grant from central government.

Work is progressing on refurbishing the North Herts Leisure Centre in Letchworth. Much of this work was essential to keep the facility functioning safely, but a new pool and cafe are included in the works. This centre, which is operated by Stevenage Leisure Ltd on behalf of the council, produces revenue for the Council, which will go up under the agreed contractual arrangements once the work is complete.

The council's planning portal is being upgraded, to a more functional system. This will continue to be supplied by Idox PLC., the current operator. A number of you have noticed how unsatisfactory the current system is. I encourage you to try the new one and send your feed back to me or to NHDC at service@north-herts.gov.uk.

The District parking strategy consultation is getting started. Town centre managers have been invited to give their views to the executive member for Policy, Transport and Green Issues. The consultation is expected to go on for several months and I will update you when I have more details.

The project to refurbish the Council Offices will soon be underway. It is expected that the work will start in the next month or so, and that staff will be relocated to other offices around the area. The work is being project managed by local firm, Wilmott Dixon. All staff will be 'decanted' from the existing District Council Offices to Town Lodge over the course of this month. Town Lodge is also in Gernon Road, but opposite the Broadway Cinema.

Hitchin Town Hall is fully operational after the refit. Council and committee meetings will be relocated to the facility during the period over which the refurbishment of the offices at Gernon Road will take place. Access to the North Herts Museum via the entrance at 14/15 Brand Street not current possible because of a dispute with the owner of this site, Hitchin Town Hall Limited. It is hoped that this can be resolved amicably, and as rapidly as possible. Discussions are taking place between the parties.

## Odyssey Health Club Planning Application

The application to build 70 dwellings on part of the Odyssey Health Club, which is in Knebworth Parish, was decided at the Planning Control Committee on the 13th October. The application was granted. The report to the Planning Control Committee conceded that a new access onto the B197 to allow direct access to the site is inappropriate development in the Green Belt. It even acknowledges that it "is harmful to the purposes of the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness". However, the report concludes that the "very special circumstances" test required to permit development in the Green Belt is met because a "separate and safe vehicular access" is required for the new housing estate.

## Proposal to designate a second AQMA in North Herts.

The Paynes Park area of Hitchin has been designated an Air Quality Management Area. This makes it the second area in North Herts to receive this designation, the other being the Stevenage Road area, also in Hitchin. This means that concentrations of nitric oxide are at risk of exceeding an annual mean of 40µg/m^3 and a one-hour mean exceed 200µg/m^3. An air quality monitoring station will be installed at the site if the proposal is approved. Results of the pollution monitoring will be published at [hertsbedsair.net](http://www.hertsbedsair.net/) although the site does not seem to have been set up yet.

## Timetable Consultation

The timetable consultation for Govia Thameslink Railways is taking place at the moment but will close at 17:00 on 8th December. This represents a significant change to the current service as the stopping trains will now all come from Cambridge (rather than alternately Cambridge and Peterborough), and will to to St Pancras. Evenings and Saturday services may be significantly reduced, although there are some suggestions that GTR have already had second thoughts about this. There is also a proposal that Knebworth goes back to having only one train per hour throughout the day on Sundays.

Full details may be obtained from the Great Northern Thameslink website: <http://www.thameslinkrailway.com/your-journey/timetable-consultation> . The Parish Council has been active in preparing a response, which should be available on its website.