**Statement of Significance for Gaping Lane Detached Gardens, Hitchin**

**(Grid Ref TL178293)**

**A unique extant example of a once common type of Detached Leisure Gardens developed during the 19th century on the edge of expanding towns for the townsfolk. Nationally few of these survive and this is the only one in Hertfordshire[[1]](#footnote-1). As a marker of the change of use from elite deer park to leisure gardens and then allotments it demonstrates over 6 centuries of productive use by the people of the town. It is a key component of its history and its late 18th and early 19th century urbanisation and growth and has been an asset to the community as garden ground.**

**Evidential value:** The continuous use of this ground, available from archival evidence, for park and garden use is now the only example left in Hertfordshire of the continuity of place in this way.

**Historical value:** This site was the northern part of the **medieval Punfold Park**, dating from before 1380 (the adjoining road is still called Old Park Road). As Hitchin developed this land became copyhold land as depicted in the bird’s eye view of Hitchin by J, Drapentier in Chauncy[[2]](#footnote-2).

By the 19th century the area had become **Park Piece Gardens**, [[3]](#footnote-3)part of the move to give townsfolk leisure gardens, not necessarily productive gardens. The most famous of these were the Guinea Gardens round Birmingham, but very few Leisure gardens survive today and none at all in Hertfordshire.

The gardens came to be called **Allotment Gardens** by 1884[[4]](#footnote-4) and continued in this use until the Hertfordshire County Council built the Samuel Lucas Infant School on the eastern art in 1974. Since then the school has expanded and playing fields added so that the small western portion of these very rare gardens is all that remains.

**Aesthetic value:** These hedged gardens offer more than just growing space; they offer the privacy provided by gardens but not by allotments, they offer the additional value of wildlife (including birdsong) for the plot holders, and a leafier nand more beautiful environment for the surrounding houses

**Communal value:** The value of open space in an expanding town, such as Hitchin is crucial to the well-being of the people who live round it. The wildlife element of the area, developed over many years, and the green space are treasured locally, as evidenced by the Gaping Lane Historic Gardens Community Association’s application to register them as a Community Asset in 2017

1. The HE *Register* entry for Hill Close Detached Gardens includes this comment: *The survival rate for this type of site is extremely low, with most examples having disappeared under built development. Where they do survive, it is generally as allotment sites with hedges and buildings removed* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Henry Chauncy *Historical Antiquities of Hertfordshire* (1700) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ordnance Survey Map 1850 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ordnance Survey Map 1884 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)