

**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**HITCHIN COMMITTEE**

**Meeting held at Christ Church Hall, Bedford Road, Hitchin,  
on 16 August 2005 at 7.30 p.m.**

**PRESENT:** *Councillors; Judi Billing (Chairman), Derek Sheard (Vice-Chairman)  
Allison Ashley, David Billing, Paul Clark, Lawrence Oliver, Deepak  
Sangha, Martin Stears, and Sarah Wren.*

**IN ATTENDANCE:** *Head of Environmental Services, Principal Planning Officers,  
Service Manager – Grounds Maintenance,  
Community Development Officer and Committee Administrator.*

*Inspector P. Wright – Hertfordshire Constabulary*

**35. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- (1) The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and the representative from Hertfordshire Constabulary.
- (2) The Chairman advised all present that the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee would be held on 27 September 2005 at Hitchin Town Hall at 7.30 p.m. preceded by Hitchin Town Talk commencing at 6.30 p.m.
- (3) The Chairman advised all present that a meeting with Hitchin Councillors would be held on 21 September concerning the Revised Churchgate Development Area Planning Brief (post public consultation period) to which a representative from all interested parties would be invited. The venue has yet to be confirmed (see Minute 52 below).

**36. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor: Joan Kirby, Sandra Lunn, R. Shakespeare – Smith and R.A.C. Thake.

**37. MINUTES – 12 July 2005**

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2005 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

**38. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS**

No other business was tabled.

**39. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

**40. PRESENTATION OF A PETITION – TELECOMMUNICATIONS MAST IN WESTMILL ROAD, HITCHIN.**

**RESOLVED** : That the formal receipt of the petition objecting to the installation of a telecommunications mast in Westmill Road, Hitchin be noted;

**41. COMMUNITY POLICING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY**

Inspector Wright thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee on Community Policing and Community Safety.

The Inspector provided an overview of the Neighbourhood Policing for Hitchin and advised that this national change was driven by Central Government and changes to further reduce crime and the fear of crime. Targets included: by 2008 all areas in England and Wales would have dedicated neighbourhood policing teams with police officers, special constables, community support officers, volunteers and neighbourhood wardens. Ultimately every citizen would know who their local officer was and how to make contact, would have a real say in policing issues and setting local priorities.

The Committee noted that there would be a dedicated team to each locality: Bearton/Oughton; Highbury/Walsworth; Hitchin Town Centre with a police sergeant for urban and rural localities. Also that the number of Community Support Officers would be increased and every effort would be made to encourage more police volunteers. The Inspector was pleased to report that Hitchin Police Unit had been awarded Pathfinder status where Hitchin would be regarded as an example of good practice.

The Inspector provided the latest statistics for: Burglary dwelling, Robbery, Violent Crime and Motor vehicle crime all of which had seen a fall in reported incidents for the period 1 April to 15 August 2005 compared to the same period in 2004. The All Crime statistics for 1 to 15 August 2005 with 135 offences, a drop of 67 against 2004 and for 1 April to 15 August 2005 a total of 1460 offences, a drop of 84 against 2004.

The Inspector concluded his presentation with commentary on Neighbourhood Watches and how vital such local groups of residents were in the campaign against crime. There were 280 co-ordinators in Hitchin with approximately 145 in the urban part of Hitchin.

### **RESOLVED**

- (1) That the information provided be noted;
- (2) That the representative from Hertfordshire Constabulary be thanked for the presentation;

### **REASON FOR DECISION**

To ensure that the Hitchin Committee are aware of progress in Community Policing and Community Safety in Hitchin.

## **42. PROGRESS REPORT ON REVISED CHURCHGATE DEVELOPMENT AREA PLANNING BRIEF – INFORMATION NOTE**

The Principal Planning Officer referred the Committee to the Information Note which provided details of the outcomes of the public consultation on the Revised Churchgate Development Area Planning Brief.

Approximately 180 responses had been received and the majority of comments had been in response to the two potential development options: Option A – The redevelopment of the Churchgate Centre and Option B – The Refurbishment of the Churchgate Centre. The Principal Planning Officer confirmed that officers had started to summarise all comments received and at the September meeting of the Hitchin Committee a comprehensive summary of the comments would be made as well as recommended amendments to the revised Draft Planning Brief.

The Committee noted the comments relating to the following key issues: Car Parking; The Market; Retail Development and Churchgate Retailers; and The Funding/Viability and Implementation of the Development Scheme.

The Committee also noted that some organisations had expressed their disappointment in that the revised brief had not considered the longer-term vision and other options that had evolved at the Community Planning Weekend. For example the re-location of the market to Market Place and High Street, limited development on St.Mary's and Portmill Lane car parks with access to the Post Office site and Hermitage Road and the possible undercrofting of car parking at St. Mary's and Portmill Lane East car parks.

The Principal Planning Officer advised the Committee that some of the issues raised during the Public Consultation were beyond the remit of the Planning Brief. However, these comments would be considered and more detailed work would be undertaken on additional car parking in terms of design and costs of decking over existing car parks. The Officer confirmed that work would commence on an implementation plan to be used following adoption of the Planning Brief and included in the plan would be liaison with Churchgate Retailers, Market Traders, surrounding retailers and landowners, Hitchin Town Centre Initiative and Hitchin Chamber of

Commerce.

Following the presentation of the Information Note the Committee were invited by the Member for Oughton Ward to consider a proposal for three areas of additional work that would enhance the Planning Brief, including the separation of the renovation of the Market from the Churchgate Development as soon as possible after the adoption of the Planning Brief. After a short debate the Committee:

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the information provided be noted;
- (2) That officers be requested to undertake the following investigations when preparing the Planning Brief:
  - (a) That the proposal to undertake more detailed work on car parking, to replace the parking spaces lost at Biggin Lane should investigate additional alternatives and respective financial viability;
  - (b) That officers be requested to give due consideration when preparing the Planning Brief to the possibility of separating the renovation of Hitchin Market from the Churchgate development in order that the redevelopment of the market area could take place as soon as possible following the adoption of the Planning Brief;
  - (c) That the Planning Brief should make clear proposals for business continuity for Churchgate and Market traders and also provide proposals for the improvement to the flow of trade between the market and Market Square.

**REASON FOR DECISION**

To ensure that the Hitchin Committee are regularly updated with outcomes from the public consultation concerning the Revised Churchgate Development Area Planning Brief.

**43. PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

**RESOLVED** to determine the planning applications as set out in the report of the Head of Planning and Building Services Control and as indicated in the following schedule:

Reference Number	SCHEDULE	
	Description of Development and Location	Decision
05/00960/1	10 Brand Street, Hitchin, SG5 1HY Change of use of ground floor offices (Class B1) to drinking establishment (Class A4)	Conditional Permission

**44. PLANNING APPEALS**

The Principal Planning Officer confirmed that one appeal had been lodged since the meeting of this Committee held on 12 July 2005.

Appellant Mr and Mrs Boyle  
Address Land at 69 Benslow Lane, Hitchin.  
Description Two storey rear extension.  
Ref. 05/00546/1HH  
Procedure Written representations.

The Principal Planning Officer confirmed that two appeals had been determined since the meeting of this Committee held on 12 July 2005.

Appellant Mr N. Trodden  
Address 13 Tilehouse Street, Hitchin.  
Description Entrance gates  
Ref. 04/01580/1 and 04/01581/1LB

Decision Appeal ALLOWED 15 July 2005

Appellant Mr and Mrs Duxbury  
Address 41 William Road, Hitchin.  
Description Two storey rear extension  
Ref. 04/00915/1

Decision Appeal DISMISSED 3 August 2005

**45. CAR PARKING AT BANCROFT GARDENS, HITCHIN**

The Service Manager – Grounds Maintenance provided a brief description on the establishment of Bancroft Gardens and the facilities available for use by the public. Associated with these many activities had been an increase in vehicles parked inside Bancroft Gardens which also included individuals who parked in the Gardens for long periods and did not use the facilities. These extra vehicles caused problems for official users of the Gardens and pedestrians.

The Committee noted that this authority's legal parking orders did not include Bancroft Gardens only the adjacent Bancroft Car Park (which was at full capacity), and therefore the Gardens could not be included within overall parking enforcement. However, the Manager confirmed that vehicles in the Gardens were prohibited under the NHDC (Pleasure Ground and Open Spaces) Byelaws 1979 section 5.

The proposed course of action would be to restrict access by a gated barrier between the tennis courts and perimeter hedge to the bowling green to all vehicles except for deliveries, maintenance and emergency vehicles, with provision for spaces for disabled driver badge holders. The advantage of a barrier at this location would restrict vehicle parking to a single area of the Gardens and not affect the use of the pavilion, public tennis courts and bowls greens.

The Committee was in support of the proposals made by the Grounds Maintenance Manager but expressed concern about the paucity of information on parking arrangements, signage and operation of the barrier. It was agreed that a graphic with the report would have assisted the decision making and provide a clear indication of parking bays, the location of the barrier and which parts of the Gardens would be free of vehicles. Comment was also made as to the role of parking enforcement and whether a contribution to the costs could be made from the enforcement revenue.

The Members for Highbury Ward were pleased to confirm that funds would be made available from their development budget 2005/2006 once an agreement had been made on the works necessary to make Bancroft Gardens a safer environment for users and free of vehicles.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That this item be **DEFERRED**.
- (2) That officers be requested to present a report to the meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held on 8 November 2005 with additional information on signage, access for disabled visitors, parking enforcement and an indicative graphic of Bancroft Gardens showing for example parking bays and location of barrier.

**REASONS FOR DECISION:**

To meet the Council's strategic objectives of encouraging responsible citizenship, the creation of safer communities with less crime and fear of crime, the promotion of first class leisure facilities and cultural facilities, whilst listening to our citizens and the delivery of responsive high quality value for money customer focussed services.

**46. MAINTENANCE OF THE DELL, HITCHIN**

The Service Manager – Grounds Maintenance reminded the Committee that the Management Plan for The Dell had been agreed at the meeting of the Hitchin Committee held on 24 May 2004 (Minute 121 (2) refers). Also at this meeting the Committee had agreed that should additional funding be required for works at The Dell a request for funding could be made.

The Committee noted that although a lot of the work required in the Management

Plan would be undertaken by volunteers, all tree felling, rubbish removal and mowing had to be done by contractors. Also the purchase of materials and tools would require funding.

The Committee reviewed the draft management plan as presented at Paragraph 6 and following a short debate the Committee:

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the amended time scales for the implementation of the management plan as presented at Paragraph 6.1 to the report be agreed;
- (2) That officers be requested to continue with the current regime of maintenance to insure that The Dell remains open to the public;
- (3) That the application for a grant of £1200 be agreed to cover the costs of tree felling and rubbish removal from The Dell and that the funds be allocated from the Highbury Ward Discretionary Budget 2005/2006.

**REASON FOR DECISION:**

To meet the Council's strategic objectives of encouraging responsible citizenship, the creation of safer communities with less crime and fear of crime, the promotion of first class leisure facilities and cultural facilities, whilst listening to our citizens and the delivery of responsive high quality value for money customer focussed services.

**47. OUGHTONHEAD COMMON HITCHIN – BID FOR GRANT INVESTMENT VIA BIFFA LAND FILL TAX CREDITS**

The Service Manager – Grounds Maintenance provided a brief description of the Land Fill Tax Credits System and how this system could be used to benefit works at Oughtonhead Common. He also provided examples of where Biffaward funding had enabled works with third party funding from this authority i.e. Surfacing of the Hambridge Way, a bridleway link between Ickleford and Holwell, village signs and seating at Holwell and the recently launched Barn Owl project.

Oughtonhead Common, some 1.5 kilometres north west of Hitchin town centre and covering some 17.3 hectares was a site rich in local social history and had long been regarded as one of the best sites for wildlife in Hertfordshire. The application to Biffa would fund enhancements to achieve three broad aims; Strengthen the definition and identity of the site; Improvement of the access for visitors whilst discouraging misuse and an Increase in the understanding of the value to every visitor to the site. Improvements to achieve these aims would concentrate on: The signing of a pedestrian route from Hitchin, Continuation of perimeter fencing, signage at all entrances to the site, Interpretation boards at the three main entrances, An information leaflet including walking routes, and, the construction of an 'Easy Access' circular riverside path for less able and wheelchair users.

**RESOLVED:** That the proposal to submit a bid to the Biffa Award Land Fill Tax Scheme for the implementation of the management and maintenance works be endorsed.

**REASON FOR DECISION:**

That the bid would make the most of an opportunity that is available to North Hertfordshire District Council for the improvement of Oughtonhead Common.

**48. PROPOSED HEALTH WALKS PROGRAMME**

The Community Development Officer presented the report on behalf of the Community Development Manager and described the background to the Health Walks which was currently organised by the Health Development Officer and the 50+ team at NHDC. The programme was very much in keeping with the strategic objectives of this authority and the National Health Service commitment to 'develop local action to tackle obesity and physical activity'.

At the moment three volunteer walk leaders guide a walk which occur two or three times a week and usually attract 10 to 11 walkers, and the aim of the project is that within the next twelve months 16 walk leaders would be recruited to lead a weekly walk in each town and many of the villages in order to make this provision accessible to as many people as possible. The walks would be graded according to

levels of fitness and last for up to one and a half-hours.

The Officer advised the Committee that the programme would be managed by the Countryside Management Service on behalf of this authority for an initial 12 month period and the Community Development Team and 50+Team and Health Development would then take over responsibility for the programme. The Committee were pleased to note that the programme would be expanded to include Workplace walks and Mother and Toddler Walks.

The Officer described the sources of funding and that the project had requested local funding via grants from the five Area Committees Development Budgets and the Committee noted that the Countryside Management Service required £4,000 to set and publicise the project. Contributions were expected to be: £760 from Stevenage and North Herts PCT and £350 from Abbott Healthcare. The balance would be met by an allocation of £578 from Hitchin Committee (Letchworth = £578, Baldock = £434, Royston = £434 and Southern Rural = £867). The Committee reviewed the Project Cost Sheet as presented at Appendix 1 to the report which identified the items expenditure up to £4,001.

**RESOLVED:** That a grant of £578 be allocated from the Hitchin Central Area Grants budget for 2005/2006 as a contribution towards the start up costs of the Health Walks Programme.

#### **REASON FOR DECISION**

To provide resources that would match funding from other partners for the establishment of an expanded Health Walks Programme.

#### **49. CHAMPION NEWS**

The Community Development Officer (CDO) provided an update on the following activities and projects since the meeting held on 12 July 2005: Skateboard facility at King George V Recreation Ground – A meeting for residents had been held on 13 July and it was felt that any concerns about anti social would be met by the ownership of the site by the users; Wheeled Sport Facility at Walsworth Common – another meeting will be arranged in September/October 2005 to discuss the proposals; Voice of Hitchin Youth – The first meeting had been entirely run by the participants and had identified three priority projects: an under 18 club, Walsworth Common Wheeled Sports Facility and King George V Skateboard Facility. There would be meetings at the three senior schools this autumn and their next meeting will be on 6 September at the Hitchin Christian Centre.

Following issues raised at the Town Talk on 12 July the CDO advised the Committee that she had met with the spokesperson for the Church of God Prophecy and investigations were in hand. Enforcement proceedings would be taken over the telecommunications mast at Hitchin Football club if there was no application for renewal. The CDO would report to the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee with an update on proposals for the expenditure of capital from the sale of NHDC housing stock.

Discussions on Alcohol free zones had taken place in November 2004 between Police and NHDC officers where it had been agreed that there was insufficient evidence to substantiate the implementation of alcohol free zones in Hitchin. A review would be taken of the need for an alcohol free zone one year after the commencement of the new licensing regulations.

**RESOLVED:** That the information provided on activities undertaken by the Community Development Officer be noted.

#### **REASON FOR DECISION**

To ensure that Hitchin Committee are kept informed of the work of the Community Development Officer.

#### **50. GRANTS TO VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT BUDGET 2005/2006**

**RESOLVED:** That the 2005/2006 funds in the Visioning Budget of £15,947, the Central Development budget deficit of (£2,700) and the total Ward Development Discretionary Budget of £53,240 be noted.

**REASON FOR DECISION:**

To advise the Hitchin Committee of funds available for disbursement in the year 2005/2006.

**51. GRANT APPLICATION – ANGELS SUPPORT GROUP**

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That a grant of £750 be awarded to Angels Support Group as a contribution towards the costs of providing support to parents, carers and siblings of children who are diagnosed, or in the process of being assessed, as suffering from attention deficit hyperactive disorder and/or autistic spectrum disorder and associated conditions with the proviso that matched funding is found from other agencies.
- (2) That after the transfer of £7,000 from the Ward Development Budget 2005/2006 using the top slicing methodology a sum of £750 be allocated from the Central Areas budget for 2005/2006.

**REASON FOR DECISION**

To ensure the continued support of the Hitchin Committee to the voluntary sector.

**52. HITCHIN TOWN CENTRE MANAGER**

The Town Manager advised the Committee that a venue could be found to host the meeting on Churchgate proposed for 21 September and the Town Centre Initiative and Chamber of Commerce welcomed this initiative. Also, an open invitation was made to Members to attend a reception on 24 August with Shell Business Enterprise awards.

The Town Centre Manager provided information on the East of England Development programme with Town Centre Partnerships where applications had to be presented no later than 15 September. Perhaps ideas could come from the Hitchin Visioning Process and as the Town Centre Initiative had a formal constitution this would enhance the application.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the information provided by the Hitchin Town Centre Manager be noted;
- (2) That the proposal by the Hitchin Town Centre Manager to host and find a suitable location for the meeting concerning the Planning Brief for Churchgate to be held on 21 September 2005 be noted.

The meeting closed at 9.08 p.m.

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Chairman