

**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**HITCHIN COMMITTEE**

**Meeting held at Roman Catholic Church Hall, Nightingale Road, Hitchin,  
on 24 January 2006 at 7.30 p.m.**

**PRESENT:** *Councillors; Judi Billing (Chairman), Derek Sheard (Vice-Chairman)  
Alison Ashley, David Billing, Paul Clark, Joan Kirby, Sandra Lunn,  
Lawrence Oliver, Deepak Sangha, R. Shakespeare – Smith,  
Martin Stears, R.A.C. Thake and Sarah Wren.*

**IN ATTENDANCE:** *Principal Planning Officer, Senior Planning Officer, Projects Manager  
– Planning Policy and Projects, Community Development Officer and  
Committee Administrator.*

**106. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting, and a warm welcome to the speakers at Agenda Item 8, Planning Applications. The Chairman advised that Item 6, Hitchin Town Hall – Community Engagement Centre would now be heard at Item 5, Public Participation.

**107. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

**108. MINUTES – 13 December 2005**

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2005 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman. Also, that the Committee Administrator be complimented on this set of minutes with particular reference to Minute 101 Area Governance.

**109. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS**

No other business was tabled.

**110. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

**111. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: HITCHIN TOWN HALL – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CENTRE**

The Chairman confirmed that this presentation would be about the proposals for the development of Hitchin Town Hall as a Community Engagement Centre.

The Hitchin Town Centre Manager and the representative from consultants – Roland Jeffrey thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee on this topic.

The Town Centre Manager advised the Committee that there could be a radical transformation from the current management culture to an entrepreneurial imaginative one. This would maximise the unique qualities of the site and he listed many of the possible activities that could take place in a new regime that would develop an inclusive range of uses across as many sectors of the community as possible. The Committee noted that a major building upgrade was necessary, linked to a transformation of the image of the built fabric of the site.

The Town Centre Manager provided details concerning the transformation of the culture, and an indication of the major upgrade works notably the requirement for compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act, and concluded with a description of Governance and management by a Board of Directors.

The Committee asked several questions of the Town Centre Manager and were unanimous in their support for this exciting development for the use of Hitchin Town Hall and how the proposed works would provide a Community Engagement Centre for the use of everyone in the local community.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the information provided in the presentation be noted;
- (2) That the Hitchin Committee unanimously supported this proposal in principle and the concept of the development and refurbishment of Hitchin Town Hall into a new role as a Community Engagement Centre.

**RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:**

- (1) That Cabinet note the unanimous support of the Hitchin Committee for the proposal in principle and the concept to convert Hitchin Town Hall into a Community Engagement Centre.
- (2) That at the next meeting of Cabinet to be held on 31 January 2006 officers as a matter of urgency present a review of the proposal made by Hitchin Town Centre Initiative and consultants Roland Jeffrey for the conversion of Hitchin Town Hall into a Community Engagement Centre.
- (3) That Cabinet note the urgency of the requirement for a review of the Hitchin Town Centre Initiative proposal in light of potential matched funding from the East of England Development Agency (EEDA) and that a deadline for the submission to EEDA had been set at 28 February 2006.

**112. CHURCHGATE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN – INITIAL POSITION**

The Projects Manager – Planning Policy and Projects (PPP) reminded the Committee that the revised Churchgate Development Area Planning Brief had been adopted by Council on 3 November 2005 (Minute 49 refers).

The Committee noted that the next stage was the asset management aspects of the scheme between NHDC and the head lessee of the Churchgate building and other third parties. The PPP confirmed that part of this process would include the preparation of an Implementation Plan as a partnership between NHDC and a potential developer of the site. The Committee were advised that no proposals had been received and therefore it was difficult for NHDC to prepare a detailed Implementation Plan.

The PPP described the proposed key principles/elements for inclusion in an Implementation Plan: Planning Application Requirements; Hitchin Market; Car Parking; Churchgate Retailers; Phasing of the Development Scheme and Third Party Involvement. The Committee were pleased to receive confirmation that a developer must give detailed consideration to the phasing of any proposed development which would include e.g. Demolition of the Churchgate Centre; Impact on Market Traders; Displacement of car parking; Demolition of existing and construction of new car parks; Environmental improvements to River Hiz, and ensuring that the impact and disturbance to surrounding properties, local businesses and visitors is kept to a minimum.

The PPP next described the four main components of an Interim Phase i.e. Market Promotion, Hammersmatch, Implementation Plan and Public Relations Plan. The Committee were pleased to note that the NHDC Scrutiny Committee had set up a Task and Finish Group to consider the promotion of and how to increase the utilisation of Market Stalls for completion by April 2006 and that the increase of special events at Hitchin Market had met with some success. Of particular interest was the Public Relations Plan which would be presented to Councillors as part of the process when discussions with a potential developer had been identified. There would be a communications process agreed by all parties to give regular updates to the Hitchin Committee and via Press Releases, Outlook, HTCI News and updates on the NHDC website.

The PPP advised the Committee that a Task and finish Group had been set up by the Scrutiny Committee and that the first meeting with the Hitchin Market Traders and NHDC officers and would take place on 8 February 2006. The Committee noted that senior officers had held discussions with Hammersmatch the Churchgate

Lessee regarding asset issues the lessee's planning consultants had contacted NHDC requesting information requirements for the site. It was hoped that a possible programme of development for Churchgate would be submitted for consideration in Spring 2006. The Committee agreed that it was essential to have regular contact with Hitchin Market Traders and the PPP confirmed that a timetable had been set for such meetings.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the information provided in the report be noted;
- (2) That the Projects Manager – Planning Policy and Projects be requested to provide updating reports to future meetings of the Hitchin Committee as and when details of proposals for Churchgate became available.

**113. PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

The Committee heard oral presentations as follows:

**Application Ref. 05/01762/1-Land rear of 1 Whitehill Close, Hitchin.**

Mr P.Hutton spoke as an individual objector.

**Application Ref. 05/01758/1 – Land rear of 1 Whitehill Close, Hitchin.**

Mr A. Chandler spoke on behalf of the residents of Whitehill Close, Broadmead and Poplar Close.

**Application Ref. 05/01795/1TD – Land at St. Michaels Road, (rear of 27 & 28 Coleridge Close, Hitchin SG4 0QA**

Caroline Romain spoke as the objectors' representative.

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

Reference Number	SCHEDULE Description of Development and Location	Decision
05/01758/1	<b>Land rear of 1 Whitehill Close, Hitchin.</b> Erection of wrought iron entrance gates and pedestrian gate to side.	<b>Refused</b> (see (a) below)
05/01762/1	<b>Land rear of 1 Whitehill Close, Hitchin.</b> Erection of one three bedroom detached dwelling house with integral garage on plot 2 as a variation of planning permission 04/01416/1 granted on 19 January 2005.	<b>Conditional Permission</b> (see (b) below)
05/01795/1TD	<b>Land at St. Michaels Road (rear of 27 &amp; 28 Coleridge Close), Hitchin SG4 0QA</b> Installation of a 11.4m high lamppost to replace existing with 3 no. antennas in shroud, radio equipment housing and ancillary development.	<b>Refused</b> (see (c) below)

(a) That with regard to planning application reference 05/01762/1 that permission be **REFUSED** for the following reasons:

- (1) By reason of the location of the gates the proposal would not, in the opinion of the Local Planning Authority, provide satisfactory space for the manoeuvring of vehicles in the immediate locality to the detriment of highway safety and convenience. The development would be contrary to Policy 57 of the District Local Plan No. 2 with Alterations.
- (2) By reason of the overall height the proposed gates would be detrimental to the appearance of the area, contrary to Policy 57 of the District Local Plan No. 2 with Alterations.

(b) That with regard to planning application reference 05/01758/1 it be **RESOLVED** that permission be **GRANTED** as per the recommendation set out in the report of the Planning and Conservation Manager with the following additional condition:

(5) Notwithstanding the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 as amended, no development as set out in Classes A,B, C, D, E. of Part 1 of Schedule 2 to the Order shall be carried out without first obtaining a specific planning permission from the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: Given the nature of this development, the Local Planning Authority considers that development which would normally be 'permitted development' should be retained within planning control in the interests of the character and amenities of the area.

(c) That with regard to planning application reference 05/01795/1TD that permission be **REFUSED** for the following reason:

(1) By reason of its siting and appearance the replacement lamppost would have an unduly intrusive impact on the neighbourhood and its inhabitants contrary to Policy 48 of the District Local Plan No. 2 with Alterations.

#### 114. ENFORCEMENT ITEM

**05/00217/1 ENF Former telephone exchange, Queen Street, Hitchin. Enforcement Action Agreed**

**RESOLVED:** That the Planning Control and Conservation Manager, subject to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services being satisfied with the evidence be authorised to take whatever enforcement action is necessary to secure the permanent removal of the banner advertising placed at the former telephone exchange, Queen Street, Hitchin.

#### 115. PLANNING APPEALS

The Principal Planning Officer confirmed that three appeals had been lodged since the meeting of this Committee held on 13 December 2005.

Appellant Miss L. Phillips  
Address 26 Purwell Lane, Hitchin.  
Description Detached 2 bedroom bungalow dwelling with attached single garage and rear vehicular access.  
Ref. 05/01260/1  
Procedure Written representations.

Appellant Eave Projects Ltd.  
Address Land to rear of 93 – 98 Bancroft, Hitchin.  
Description Implementation of planning permission ref. 03/00569/1 dated 18.09.03 without compliance with Condition 4 (archaeological observation and recording).  
Ref. 05/01503/1  
Procedure Written representations.

Appellant Weston Homes Plc  
Address Land off Walsworth Road, Hitchin. (adjacent to B & Q Store)  
Description 93 one and two bedroom flats, 12 two and three bedroom houses, parking and access (approval of details pursuant to planning permission ref. 03/00959/1 granted 21.06.05)  
Ref. 05/01503/1  
Procedure Written representations.

The Principal Planning Officer confirmed that one appeal had been determined since the meeting of this Committee held on 13 December 2005.

Appellant Mr and Mrs K. Boyle  
Address 69 Benslow Lane, Hitchin. SG4 9QZ  
Description Two storey rear extension.  
Ref. 05/00546/1HH  
Decision Appeal DISMISSED on 19 January 2006.  
Committee/ Delegated  
Delegated

**116. PROPOSAL FOR NEW YOUTH WORKS PROJECT FOR WESTMILL ESTATE**

The Community Development Officer advised the Committee that Groundwork Hertfordshire following youth consultation, had concluded that North Hertfordshire and in particular the Westmill Estate in Hitchin would be a suitable location in which to base a two-year Youth Works Scheme. Unfortunately the Index of Multi-Deprivation indicated that Westmill was the most deprived in Hertfordshire and that it had more anti-social behaviour and youth related crime than other areas in North Hertfordshire.

A proposal had been made for a feasibility study which would scope out the needs of the area, research baseline data to measure against the project, consult with local youth, clarify what is available for young people and assess the potential for partnership working. The Committee noted that should the feasibility study have a positive outcome then a dedicated Youth Worker should be appointed to develop a programme of activities (e.g. practical hands - on conservation projects, youth seminars, training programmes, mentoring schemes and new youth skills) on Westmill Estate and manage the project. The Youth Worker would work closely with local partners (e.g. North Herts Homes, Herts Police, Westmill Community Centre, Hitchin Youth Trust and Caldicott Centre Trust), and convene a steering group that could advise the project.

The Committee noted that Groundwork Hertfordshire would *inter alia* undertake and provide: Project Management, Employment of a Youth Worker, Facilitate and administer the steering group, office equipment and fund raising. The CDO identified some of the benefits of the scheme e.g. Interaction with the Council's Strategic Objectives of Sustainable and Safer Communities, a dedicated Youth Worker and a reduction in crime and anti-social behaviour at Westmill.

The Committee reviewed the timing of the project programme between February 2006 and March 2008 and noted that the estimated cost of the project would be £114, 900 spread over the next two financial years. The Committee were unanimous in their support for this very important programme that would benefit young people living on the Westmill Estate, as well as those living in Hitchin and elsewhere in North Hertfordshire.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the information provided in the report concerning the proposal for a new Youth Works Project for Westmill Estate be noted;
- (2) That the proposal for a new Youth Works Project for Westmill Estate had the unanimous support of the Hitchin Committee;
- (3) That the award in principle of £10,000 from the 2006/2007 Area Development budget a contribution towards the annual running costs of a Youth Works Project in 2006/2007 with the proviso that additional funding is secured in this financial year be agreed;
- (4) That the award in principle of £10,000 from the 2007/2008 Area Development budget as a contribution towards the annual running costs of a Youth Works Project in 2007/2008 with the proviso that additional funding is secured in this financial year be agreed.
- (5) That the Community Development Officer be requested to ensure that users of the Westmill Community Centre are advised and consulted on the proposals for the Youth Works Project.

**REASON FOR DECISIONS:**

To allow a project to proceed that links into priorities highlighted within both Hitchin Visioning and the NHDC Corporate Plan, whilst maximising opportunities to attract inward investment into the area.

**117. CHAMPION NEWS**

The Community Development Officer (CDO) provided an update on activities since the last meeting of the Hitchin Committee held on 13 December 2006: Town centre signage via finger posts; Westmill Community – Young People; Healthy Walks Programme; Mill Media; Hitchin Social Club; and Hitchin Extended Schools Consortium.

The CDO welcomed suggestions on signage in the town centre and provided details of the recent meeting held on 17 January 2006 about young people and Westmill Community and the outcomes of the questionnaire. The Healthy Walks programme had commenced on 16 January 2006 and had been well attended and the Committee noted that weekend walks were planned. The eighth edition of 'Mill Media' had been distributed on 22 December 2005 and the Hitchin Social Club had started meeting on a Wednesday afternoon at Woodside Hall. Representatives from several agencies had met in December 2005 to look at the delivery of services to the 5 – 18 age group in families in the Oughton and Bearton Wards which came under the umbrella of Hitchin Extended Schools Consortium.

**RESOLVED:** That the information provided by the Community Development Officer on activities since the last meeting of the Hitchin Committee held on 13 December 2005 be noted.

**REASON FOR DECISIONS:**

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

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

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the 2005/2006 funds remaining in the Visioning Budget of £1,680, the Central Area Budget of £0, the Base Budget of £240 and the total Ward Development Discretionary Budget of £5,470 be noted.

**REASON FOR DECISION:**

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

**119. GRANT APPLICATION – HITCHIN CABBIES HUT, MARKET SQUARE, HITCHIN**

**RESOLVED** that an award of £1,300 be made as a contribution towards the costs associated with the refurbishment and painting of the Hitchin Cabbies Hut located at Market Square, Hitchin and that this sum be taken from the 2005/2006 Visioning Budget.

**120. HITCHIN TOWN CENTRE MANAGER**

The Hitchin Town Centre Manager thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee on the proposals made by the Hitchin Town Centre Initiative for the development of Hitchin Town Hall into a Community Engagement Centre. This was an example of the links with the East of England Development Agency (EEDA) and he confirmed that another bid to EEDA would be made very soon concerning 'Visitor Accessibility'. Should this application be successful the grant would cover new style finger posts in Hitchin Town Centre, brown heritage signs within and without Hitchin and possibly a replacement barrier at the junction of High Street and Brand Street from a swing barrier to a lifting bollard type barrier.

**RESOLVED** That the information provided by the Hitchin Town Centre Manager be noted.

The meeting closed at 9.00 p.m.

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Chairman