

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

HITCHIN COMMITTEE

**Meeting held at Christ Church Hall, Bedford Road, Hitchin,
on 18 April 2006 at 7.30p.m.**

MINUTES

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

IN ATTENDANCE: *Strategic Director of Customer Services, Chief Engineer, Principal
Engineer, Principal Planning Officer, Community Development
Officer and Committee & Member Services Officer.*

137. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting, and a warm welcome to the speakers at Agenda Item 5 – Public Participation (ROTW 2005, and Hitchin Market Traders).

138. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from: Councillors Sandra Lunn and Deepak Sangha.

139. MINUTES – 7 March 2006

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 7 March 2006 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

140. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS -

The Chairman confirmed that an additional item concerning the proposed closure of sports Pavilions in Hitchin would be taken in order to receive a response from Cabinet to the concerns raised by the Hitchin Committee at its meeting held on 7 March 2006 (Minute124 refers).

The Chairman gave as a reason for urgency the need to have clarification about the maintenance of sports pavilions before the closure of this football season and the commencement of the 2006 – 2007 football season as well as the use of Walsworth and Ransome's Rec. sports pavilions for non sporting events this summer, including constant use by the Triangle Community Garden at Ransome's Rec.

141. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Agenda Item 5 – Planning Applications

Ref. 06/00167/1 Land at King George V Playing Field, Old Hale Way.

Councillor Paul Clark declared a prejudicial interest as he was a coach at Hitchin Rugby Club and that he would leave the room for the duration of the item.

Councillors Martin Stears, Lawrence Oliver and R.A.C.Thake declared a personal interest as the appointed representatives of NHDC to the Management Committee of Hitchin Rugby Club and that they would remain in the room for this item, speak and vote.

Agenda Item 10 – Annual Grants, Development, Discretionary and Visioning Budgets 2005/2006

Ref. Grant Application – Tilehouse Street Pre – School.

Councillor Martin Stears declared a personal interest as he was associated with the church where the pre – school met and confirmed that he would remain in the room for this item, speak and vote.

Ref. Grant Application – Hitchin Town Centre Initiative

Councillor R.A.C. Thake declared a personal interest as a member of his immediate family was undertaking work experience at HTCI and confirmed that he would remain in the room for this item, speak and vote.

142. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: RHYTHMS OF THE WORLD 2005 AND 2006

The representative from the ROTW festival committee wished to place on record the thanks of all those involved for the support provided by the Hitchin Committee, as well as the officers in Leisure and Community Development.

The Committee noted that the ROTW Festival for 2006 would take place over the weekend of 15 and 16 July and although it was evident in 2005 that everyone had enjoyed all the attractions the sense of a cultural event had receded and that in 2006 much more attention would be to 'Rhythms of the World' with a five point Rhythms code: Enjoy each day and each event, Respect Hitchin, Take rubbish home, No glass and above all show appreciation for the acts and shows. Also there would be more involvement in education aspects of the 2006 festival via the Arts Council and Herts Music.

However the biggest problem facing the 2006 festival was the bureaucracy and 'red tape' due to new legislation for Temporary Event Licences, in fact probably the most onerous activity for the Committee which could distract the festival committee from the main activity of the festival acts and cultural events.

The Committee noted the comments concerning the licence administration and expressed a wish that officers give as much assistance as possible to the ROTW Festival 2006.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the information provided in the presentation be noted;
- (2) That officers be requested to assist the ROTW Festival Committee wherever possible in the temporary event licence application process.

143. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: HITCHIN MARKET TRADERS – BUSINESS PLAN

The representative from Hitchin Market Traders thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and confirmed that all members had received a copy of a paper detailing key objectives, proposed changes for the next two years, key actions, performance indicators and timetable. The representative advised the Committee of the following key points during his presentation: The paucity of feedback to the Market Traders by NHDC, Rent structure, rent collection, spreading, market appearance, advertising and promotion, opening of Biggin Lane car park, traders parking charges, payment method, the involvement of Hitchin Committee, the involvement of Hitchin Town Centre Initiative, partnership support from NHDC and finally how Hitchin Councillors and Hitchin residents might help Hitchin Market prosper.

The robust presentation of the Hitchin Traders was noted by the Committee and it was apparent that despite the best efforts of all stakeholders there had been a breakdown in communication and a misunderstanding of documents, business plans and financial forecasting.

During the ensuing debate the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport reminded the Committee that risk assessments must be taken on all proposed financial matters under consideration by NHDC and added that very careful consideration must be taken on any change of management and that there were other retail competitors to the Market in Hitchin. The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee advised the Committee that the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group – Usage and Promotion of Markets would be finalising their report on 26 April 2006 (presentation to Scrutiny on 23 May 2006) and through the Chairman the Committee requested that this report should be presented at the meeting to be held on 30 May 2006.

The Strategic Director of Customer Services (SDCS) confirmed that NHDC was committed to maintaining the vitality of all the towns in North Herts and it was well known that market towns faced a challenge due to lifestyle changes, retail habits and that markets had to respond to these changes. The SDCS advised that in keeping with the Council's budget strategy, investigations would determine whether

market operators, other than NHDC, might be involved in the management of the NHDC markets. The Committee noted that this could include commercial organisations, town centre partnerships or market traders themselves. The SDCS accepted that the financial forecasts prepared by the Market Traders was at variance with officers interpretation of the business plan and it was evident that all parties should meet to clarify data and examine where any of the proposals could be implemented as 'a quick fix'. The SDCS reminded the Committee that due recognition must be made of any future development of the Churchgate Centre and the involvement of the Market.

It was evident during the presentation, the responses by the representative of the Market Traders, the responses for the SDCS and comments by Members that a great deal of misunderstanding and on occasion mistrust had affected the future of Hitchin Market. The Chairman considered that this lack of cross-cultural exchange was damaging to all concerned and that a quarterly cycle of meetings was inadequate and that it was essential for all parties to meet and make progress.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the representative of the Hitchin Market Traders be thanked for the presentation and the information provided;
- (2) That the Scrutiny Officer be requested to make the necessary arrangements for the presentation to the Hitchin Committee at its meeting to be held on 30 May 2006 of the final report from the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group – Usage and Promotion of Markets;
- (3) That the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and E-Government be requested to meet with the Chairman of the Hitchin Committee as soon as possible (after 26 April 2006) to discuss the recommendations of the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group – Usage and Promotion of Markets;
- (4) That the Strategic Director of Customer Services be requested to facilitate swift progress on the issues raised by the Hitchin Market Traders at this meeting and ensure that all interested parties are advised of progress on a regular basis.

REASON FOR DECISIONS:

To ensure that the issues concerning Hitchin Market are discussed with all parties, reviewed as soon as possible, and solutions are expedited in a timely manner

144. ADDITIONAL ITEM - CLOSURE OF SPORTS PAVILIONS IN HITCHIN

Reason for urgency: *Clarification required about the maintenance of sports pavilions before the closure of this football season and the commencement of the 2006 – 2007 football season as well as the use of Walsworth and Ransome's Rec. sports pavilions for non sporting events this summer, including constant use by the Triangle Community Garden at Ransome's Rec.*

The Chairman referred to the meeting held on 7 March 2006 (Minute 129 (3) refers) and that there had been no response from Cabinet and invited the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport to make a statement to the Committee. In response the Portfolio holder advised that there had been a lot of misinformation about the details concerning the Savings proposals for the closure of certain sports pavilions in North Hertfordshire. An error had been made concerning King George V Playing Fields, which had been immediately corrected. The settlement grant from central government meant accumulated savings of £1.5M had to be made and this included savings at all services including sports pavilions. The Portfolio Holder reminded the Committee that there had been ample opportunity to make representations and he was surprised that many Members had not understood the proposals for Savings in the year 2006-2007. Unfortunately there were no funds available to amend the savings proposals and it would be in the gift of the Area Committees to provide funds for the maintenance of the sports pavilions. The Portfolio Holder in conclusion confirmed that the pavilions would remain open until the end of the current football season.

Despite the issues raised by the Portfolio holder it was clear from comments made by the Committee e.g.

- The Pavilions are not just used for sport, with many recreation grounds and buildings used throughout the summer for festivals and community events;
- To many issues had been raised and that there were no funds available from the Hitchin Committee;
- The Council were lacking in initiative and this was an ideal opportunity to look at joint partnership working;
- Local groups should be invited to assist in the operation and maintenance of pavilions;
- What are the plans for the new football season in that club secretaries would be booking pitches and facilities long before 1 September 2006;
- The problem is between now and the opening of new or refurbished pavilions;
- What are the costs of refurbishment in this interim period;
- Where are the alternative sources of funds for refurbishment;

The Chairman thought that all these comments were sound but some form of 'linkage' of all parties and how they could work together was lacking and the Strategic Director of Customer Services agreed to look at this problem and invite potential users and supporters to a preliminary meeting to galvanise action.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the information provided by the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport be noted;
- (2) That the lack of communication between Cabinet and Hitchin Committee (Minute 129(3) of 7 March refers) had not been helpful in the decision process for the future of sports pavilions in Hitchin;
- (3) That the Strategic Director of Customer Services be requested to make the necessary arrangements to convene a meeting of all interested parties that would look at opportunities that could keep sports pavilions open e.g., sponsorship of a pavilion; voluntary groups (see Minute 150 (2) below) and participation from Hitchin Town Centre Initiative.

REASON FOR DECISIONS:

To explore every opportunity and allow every possible source of assistance for the continuity of use of sports pavilions in Hitchin.

145. CONTROLLED PARKING ZONES – THE AVENUE AND TRIANGLE AREAS (RESULTS OF SURVEY, PROPOSALS, AND IMPLEMENTATION)

The Chief Engineer presented the report and appendices, which provided details of the consultation in both areas and that a CPZ in The Avenue/Chiltern Road had been approved by residents. However, it was clear that there was a definite split in The Triangle Area for and against the CPZ associated with specific roads.

During the ensuing debate it was clear that Highbury Ward Members wanted the CPZ in The Avenue/Chiltern Road to proceed as soon as possible and not delay to allow both CPZs to be implemented at the same time.

Bearton Ward Members were concerned that any CPZ for the Triangle Area met the aspirations of as many residents, businesses and places of worship as possible and with this in mind proposed that a meeting be convened as soon as possible with officers, residents and Bearton Ward Members to clarify the purpose of a CPZ and the views of all concerned. It was also proposed that a time limit of three months be set for all activities to be completed.

The Committee debated the changes to the substantive motion and subsequently:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the information provided in the report be noted;

- (2) That the proposals for the parking controls in The Avenue/Chiltern Road area detailed at Appendix A, with the addition of 'NO WAITING 10.00 – 11.00 and 16.00 – 1700 Monday to Friday' in the cul-de-sac fronting numbers 17 and 18 Highbury Road be agreed and that the procedures for the necessary Traffic Regulation Orders be commenced immediately;
- (3) That Convent Close be included within the Triangle Area Controlled Parking Zone;
- (4) That officers in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport and Bearton Ward Councillors meet with representatives of the Triangle Residents Association and the Triangle Residents Against the Parking Proposals as a matter of urgency to discuss and agree changes to the proposals in relation to the times selected for restrictions, removal of unnecessary parking prohibitions (i.e. double yellow lines), improvement of shopping arrangements;
- (5) That following these discussions a full consultation should be carried out with the assistance of the groups referred to in (3) above which would actively include seeking the views of businesses and places of worship in the Triangle Area;
- (6) That the commencement of procedures for making the necessary Traffic Regulation Orders for the Triangle Area Controlled Parking Zone be delayed for a maximum of three months to allow the actions detailed in (4) and (5) above take place;
- (7) That the Community Development Officer be requested to convene a meeting with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Hitchin Committee to investigate sources of resource (e.g. The Visioning Budget 2006-2007) to allow the consultation referred to at (5) above.

REASON FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) The numbers supporting the proposals for a CPZ in The Avenue/Chiltern Road area exceeded the 50 per cent criteria required for implementation;
- (2) To allow the residents, businesses and places of worship in the Triangle Area the fullest opportunity to confirm their views on a CPZ.

146. **PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

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
06/00145/1	<p>Land off Walsworth Road (adjacent to B & Q store and rear of 59-69 Dacre Road, Hitchin)</p> <p>Residential development of 105 dwellings comprising of 33 one bedroom and 58 two bedroom flats in 2 blocks of 2-5 storeys over a semi -basement parking area for 90 vehicles. 2 two storey terraced dwellings comprising 1 one bedroom & 1 two bedroom flats, 9 two bedroom & 3 three bedroom houses with 15 parking spaces.</p> <p>New vehicular and pedestrian access via Walsworth Road. Emergency & refuse vehicle access and pedestrian access via existing driveway between 64 & 66 Dacre Road. Landscaping and ancillary works. (Approval of siting, design, external appearance and landscaping details pursuant to outline permission ref. 03/00959/1 granted 21 June 2005).</p>	<p>REFUSED (see (a) below)</p>
05/01444/1	<p>Land to the rear of and including 134 – 150 (evens), Grove Road, Hitchin</p> <p>2, 3, 4 & 5 storey development to provide 29 one and 36 two bedroom flats; 9 two; 3 three and 21 four bedroom houses (total 98); 65 basement and 54 surface level garage/parking spaces. Single point of vehicular access adjacent 152 Grove Road, landscaping and ancillary works. (As amended by plans received 20.01.06, 25.01.06 and 17.02.06 and revised Transport Assessment received 15.12.05)</p>	<p>WITHDRAWN (by the applicant)</p>
06/00167/1	<p>Hitchin Rugby Football Club, George V Playing field, Old Hale Way, Hitchin, SG5 1XL</p> <p>Change of use of part of Council depot from open storage to public car park (37 spaces) with access via existing driveway off Old Hale Way plus provision of 2.4m high boundary fencing and security fencing.</p>	<p>Conditional Permission (as report)</p>
06/00319/1	<p>35, Churchyard, Hitchin, SG5</p> <p>Renewal of temporary planning permission ref. 03/02042/1 granted 25.02.04 for the change of use from Class A1 (retail) to Class A3 (food & drink) for a further 3 years (24.02.07 to 24.02.2010).</p>	<p>Conditional Permission (see (b) below)</p>

(a) That with regard to planning application 06/00145/1 that reasons 3 and 4 be amended to read as follows:

(3) The design of the access arrangements would give rise to conditions detrimental to the free and safe flow of traffic and consequently would not conform to Policy 29 of the Hertfordshire County Structure Plan 1991-2011;

(4) The application does not provide appropriate measures for access by emergency or service vehicles and consequently would not conform to Policy 29 of the Hertfordshire County Structure Plan 1991-2011.

(b) That with regard to planning application 06/00319/1 the Committee concluded that it would be appropriate to renew the temporary permission previously granted for a further 3 year period from the expiry date of the original decision; it was consequently **RESOLVED** to grant planning permission subject to the following conditions:

(1) The use hereby permitted shall be discontinued on or before 24 February 2010;

Reason: The premises are within a shopping frontage area, subject of restrictions upon non-retail use under Policy 43 of the District Local Plan No. 2 with Alterations. A temporary permission is granted in this instance pending the outcomes of proposals for the Churchgate Shopping Centre.

(2) The premises shall only be used as a café or restaurant and for no other purpose whatsoever, including any other use within Class A3 as set out in the Schedule to the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987.

Reason: The change of use of the premises to uses other than that approved could result in harm to the amenities of the surrounding area and hence the Local Planning Authority considers that such changes should be retained within planning control.

147. PLANNING APPEALS

The Principal Planning Officer confirmed that no appeals had been lodged and no appeals had been determined since the meeting of this Committee held on 7 March 2006.

148. CHAMPION NEWS

The Community Development Officer (CDO) provided an update on the following: Youth Works Westmill Project, Triangle Planning Project, ROTW 2006, Grants to: Angels Support Group, Women's Counselling Centre, Hitchin Town Hall, March Town Talk Issues and Triangle Festival 2006.

As a follow up to the presentation to Cabinet on 28 March 2006 (Minute 202 refers) of the HTCI proposal for Hitchin Town Hall to be refurbished and promoted as a Community Engagement Centre that CDO confirmed that discussions would be held between NHDC, HTCI and East of England Development Agency at the end of April 2006 to explore a way forward.

In response to a question concerning access to Windmill Hill the CDO confirmed that the NHDC Equality Development Officer and a local resident from the Access Consultancy Group had made a site visit and concluded that the gains would be far outweighed by the cost of works. In addition there would be a considerable scar left from excavation of material to make an acceptable gradient and fencing would be required at the Queen Street entrances. Notwithstanding the above the Committee felt that a feasibility study of the whole scheme with costings would be appropriate.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the information provided by the Community Development Officer on activities since the last meeting of the Hitchin Committee held on 7 March 2006 be noted;
- (2) That the Community Development Officer in consultation with the Head of Leisure be requested to allocate sufficient resource from the 2006 –2007 Visioning Budget for a feasibility study on the cost of works at the Queen Street entrance points to Windmill Hill to allow much easier access for people with disabilities and people with buggies and push chairs.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To ensure that the Hitchin Committee are kept informed of the work of the Community Development Officer and to proceed with a feasibility study on access to Windmill Hill.

149. GRANTS TO VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT BUDGET 2005/2006

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the expenditure, allocations, and balance of the current 2005-06 Development budget, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be noted;
- (2) That the previous award of £10,000 for the ROTW Festival in 2006 be confirmed with the provision of a retention of £1,000 (to cover any damages and an appropriate cleaning after the event) be agreed;
- (3) That the proposal to transfer the unallocated amount in the Ward Budgets for 2005-2006 to the Visioning Budget for 2006-2007 be agreed;
- (4) That the proposal to transfer the allocated Visioning amount in the Ward Budgets 2005-2006 to the Visioning Budget for 2006 – 2007 be agreed;

REASON FOR DECISIONS:

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

150. GRANT APPLICATION – TILEHOUSE STREET PRE-SCHOOL

RESOLVED: That a grant of £1000 be awarded to Tilehouse Street Pre-School as a contribution to the costs of providing an outdoor play area and toilet facilities.

151. GRANT APPLICATION – NORTH HERTS AMATEUR BOXING CLUB

RESOLVED: That a grant of £999 be awarded to the North Herts Boxing Club as a contribution to the day to day costs associated with the training and promotion of fitness, suitable equipment, boxing skills, self defence and healthy eating.

152. GRANT APPLICATION – HITCHIN TOWN BOWLS CLUB

RESOLVED: That a grant of £1000 be awarded to Hitchin Town Bowls Club as a contribution towards the costs of renovating the clubhouse.

153. GRANT APPLICATION – HITCHIN TOWN CENTRE INITIATIVE

RESOLVED: That a grant of £11, 750 be awarded to Hitchin Town Centre Initiative as a contribution towards the costs of providing hanging baskets and Christmas Lights in Hitchin Town Centre

154. HANGING BASKETS – MARKET PLACE, HITCHIN

RESOLVED: That a grant of £1300 be awarded from the 2006-2007 Visioning budget to Hitchin Town Centre Initiative to provide 13 hanging baskets in the Market Place, Hitchin Town Centre

155. HITCHIN TOWN CENTRE MANAGER

The Hitchin Town Centre Manager thanked the Chairman and the Committee for the support given to the proposal to use Hitchin Town Hall as a Community Engagement Centre. As the Council had been unable to commit resource to this venture the application had not gone forward to EEDA, however the Town Centre Manager was investigating other sources of financial support and indeed there was a faint chance of renewing EEDA interest in this very important and valuable community asset. The whole process had highlighted the difficulties of partnership working and emphasised the need for constant links with NHDC, local businesses and Hitchin Town Centre Initiative. With this in mind the Chairman commented on the one year only renewal of the Service Level Agreement between NHDC and the HTCI and the Committee unanimously agreed that that this decision should be rescinded with a referral to Cabinet for restoration of a three year SLA.

The Town Centre Manager considered that following the presentation by the Hitchin Market Traders there was an opportunity to gather together local community enterprise and business expertise (via the HTCI) for the development, promotion and marketing of the market. There had been a lot of improvement in the last six months following the appointment of the Markets Manager, and the way forward was to ensure that there was regular dialogue between all parties, and that if Hitchin Market was to maintain its position within the town a way forward could be moving the control and management of the market into the Hitchin business community. The TCM recognised that this was not straightforward as there were other markets in North Herts run by the local authority and Hitchin Market could not at the moment be taken in isolation.

The TCM was concerned that not enough contact had been made by NHDC with local voluntary organisations concerning the repair and maintenance of local sports pavilions. It might be possible for local enterprise to 'adopt' a pavilion and for example the Voice of Hitchin Youth could be asked for volunteers to provide some immediate renovation to ensure continuing use of sports pavilions. The TCM considered that throughout Hitchin there would be people/organisations who could render assistance.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the information provided by the Hitchin Town Centre Manager be noted;
- (2) That the proposal to source assistance from voluntary organisations in Hitchin in the repair and ongoing maintenance of sports pavilions in Hitchin be welcomed;
- (3) That the proposal to provide support to Hitchin Market from the Hitchin Town Centre Initiative as part of a Community enterprise be noted;
- (4) The Hitchin Committee unanimously expressed dissatisfaction that the three-year Service Level Agreement for the Hitchin Town Centre Initiative had only been extended by 12 months and would be to the detriment of Hitchin.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

- (1) That Cabinet acknowledges the dissatisfaction of the Hitchin Committee to the reduction of the length of the Service Level Agreement with the Hitchin Town Centre Initiative;
- (2) That Cabinet be requested to renew the Service Level Agreement with the Hitchin Town Centre Initiative for a three year period, in accordance with the Council's normal practice and that this should be a decision taken by the Political Administration.

REASON FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) To ensure immediate action that would allow sports pavilions in Hitchin to remain open and used by the Hitchin Community.
- (2) That Cabinet be requested to renew the Service Level Agreement to the Hitchin Town Centre Initiative for a three year period in order to provide stability and continuing support of the Hitchin Committee to the town of Hitchin.

156. COUNCILLOR SANDRA LUNN

The Chairman confirmed that Councillor Sandra Lunn would not be seeking re-election to North Herts District Council and proposed and seconded by the Vice-Chairman it was:

RESOLVED: That a vote of thanks be recorded in respect of the service provided by Councillor Sandra Lunn to the community in Walsworth Ward, Hitchin and North Hertfordshire between 1998 and 2006 and for her role as Vice-Chairman to the Hitchin Committee.

At the conclusion of the meeting the Chairman wished those seeking re-election good luck for the forthcoming campaign.

The meeting closed at 9.47p.m.

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Chairman