

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

HITCHIN COMMITTEE

**Meeting held at Roman Catholic Church Hall, Hitchin,
on 31 October 2006 at 7.30p.m.**

MINUTES

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

IN ATTENDANCE: *Barrie Jones – Head of Financial Services, Graham Haerle- Principal Planning Officer, Steve Crowley – Leisure Projects Manager Lance Raperport – NHDC Markets Manager, Margaret Bracey - Community Development Officer, Nigel Schofield – Committee Administrator.*

Note: Councillor R. Shakespeare – Smith left the room at 8.54 p.m.

59. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked those who had attended the Town Talk.

The Chairman welcomed the speakers at Agenda Item 8 – Planning Applications.

The Chairman welcomed the representative from Hitchin Fairtrade (Councillor Martin Stears).

The Chairman was pleased to announce that the third 'open air' Hitchin Community Surgery held on 7 October 2006 at Market Place had been very successful, if a little windy. The next surgery would also be at Hitchin Market Place on 4 November 2006 and revert to Church House, Church Yard should the weather be inclement.

60. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

61. MINUTES – 28 September 2006

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2006 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

MINUTE 52 (3) AND (4) – NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE HIGHWAYS PARTNERSHIP – JOINT MEMBER PANEL DISCRETIONARY BUDGET - 2006-2007 AND 2007 - 2008

(3) The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport confirmed that he would be meeting with the North Herts District Manager of Hertfordshire Highways and the temporary NHDC/NHHP liaison officer on Friday 3 November to discuss future arrangements for linkage to the Joint Member Panel and the outstanding request for cost estimates for schemes and projects put forward by the Hitchin Committee.

(4) County Councillor David Billing advised the Committee that at the meeting of the Joint Member Panel held on 16 October 2006 (Minute 26 refers) it had been accepted that as there was no liaison officer at NHDC for the North Herts. District Manager to discuss the proposals made by the five Area Committees there could be no movement on these schemes in the current financial year. The Committee noted that the remaining funds in the JMP Discretionary Budget for 2006-2007 had been allocated to a scheme in Royston.

The Committee expressed extreme concern that this decision by the JMP would mean a long delay in the delivery of any schemes identified by Hitchin Members. The Committee consequently requested that the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport make every effort to ensure that priority be given to the costing of the Hitchin Schemes and when joint funding was agreed that the approved schemes be implemented as soon as possible.

MINUTE 53 (2) AND (3)– THE USE OF A BYELAW TO CONTROL VERGE PARKING IN HITCHIN

The Chairman advised the Committee that the requested report on the above item would not be presented at this meeting. The Head of Housing and Environmental Health had confirmed that this work was part enforcement and part engineering. Unfortunately the Grounds Maintenance Manager remained on sick leave after four weeks away and consequently the survey of verge parking 'hotspots' was not complete. Other resourcing from within highways engineering was very limited which impacted greatly on the ability of this authority to investigate the verge parking problem. The Chairman expected that a report would be presented to the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held on 12 December 2006.

62. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Agenda Item 11 – Grant application – Hitchin Boys School

Councillor R.A.C. Thake declared an interest in this item and remained in the room for the determination of this grant application.

63. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – HITCHIN FAIRTRADE

Councillor Martin Stears thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee on the latest news concerning Fairtrade in Hitchin.

Councillor Stears advised the Committee that the next Fairtrade event would be a Winter Gala at Market Place, Hitchin on Sunday 10 December 2006, that Fairtrade Fortnight would be from 26 February to 11 March 2007 with a possible display at Hitchin Library and that a Fairtrade café and lunches event would be held on Saturday 3 March 2007 at Christ Church Hall, Bedford Road, Hitchin.

Councillor Stears suggested that as rooms had been booked for the café and lunches day it might be appropriate to hold the Hitchin Community Surgery scheduled for the same date at the same venue as the Fairtrade day.

Councillor Stears confirmed that each Fairtrade event sought to be self financing via donations and individual collections and that promotion of Fairtrade was essential and that this could be achieved by road signage on the entry roads into Hitchin and signs in stores stocking Fairtrade products. The Committee agreed to the proposal that as no grant application had been made in 2006 it would be appropriate to consider a grant application to the 2007 Discretionary Budget as a contribution to costs in the ensuing year.

Councillor Stears concluded the presentation with a request that two Members of the Council be appointed to the Hitchin Steering Group within the North Herts Fairtrade Towns Group. The Committee agreed to this proposal and that the Democratic Services Manager be requested to make the necessary arrangements using his delegated responsibility.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Councillor Martin Stears be thanked for the informative presentation on Hitchin Fairtrade;
- (2) That this Committee supports the aims and objectives of Fairtrade;
- (3) That the Community Surgery to be held on 3 March 2007 will take place at Christ Church Hall in conjunction with the Fairtrade café morning and lunches day;

- (4) That the Community Development Officer be requested to note the request for funding and make the necessary arrangements to place a grant application to the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held on 12 December 2006;
- (5) That the Democratic Services Manager be requested under delegated responsibility to make the necessary arrangements for the appointment of two Members of the Council to the Hitchin Steering Group of the North Herts Fairtrade Towns Group.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To continue the support of the Hitchin Committee for local community groups.

64. HITCHIN MARKET – UPDATE INFORMATION NOTE

The Markets Manager (MM) thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to update the Committee on key aspects of the Hitchin Market Plan as detailed at Appendix A.

The MM advised the Committee that following the introduction of the six month trial period in August 2006 the Tuesday stall usage had risen from 44 per cent to 59 per cent at the middle of October 2006 and the Saturday stall usage had risen from 61 per cent to 71 per cent for the same period which equated to increases of 15 per cent and 10 per cent respectively. The Committee were pleased to note that this increase had come about as result of the reduced rents programme and the MM advised that it was anticipated that all of the £31,000 set a side by Council at its meeting held on 27 July 2006 (Minute 33 refers) would be used by the end of the six month trial period. Although the expenditure of £31,000 was a disappointment the Chairman considered that the overall trend in stall utilisation was encouraging. The MM confirmed that the increase on a Tuesday was due to the greater number of commodities for sale on that day compared to a Saturday. The Committee noted that officers and Market Traders were working together to improve the usage on both days through special events, publicity and promotion at other markets.

Promotion had included and would include 'British Food Fortnight', 'Diwali' 'Craft Fair' in Market Square on 3 December, 'Sunday Market' in Market Square on 17 December, a Christmas Market on 24 December and a Valentine Market in February 2007. The HMM confirmed that all these events had been and would be promoted in the local press, local radio, What's on Where guide, The Advertiser, The Bedfordshire Journal, The Good Holiday Guide and various seasonal publications.

The MM advised the Committee that the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and e Government sought the views of Members concerning a request for Car Boot sales in the Lairage car park from January to April 2007. The Committee considered this suggestion had merit and subject to the Markets Manager and Leisure Project Manager reaching an agreement with the promoter that the car boot sales should proceed.

The Committee reviewed the Market Action Plan (Appendix A), The Promotions and Events Calendar (Appendix B) and the Advertising Expenditure (Appendix C).

- (1) That the NHDC Markets Manager be thanked for the Information Note;
- (2) That the details provided in Appendix A – NHDC Markets Action Plan, Appendix B – NHDC Markets events diary for 2006-2007 and Appendix C – Advertising Programme and Budget 2006 be noted;
- (3) That the proposal to hold car boot sales in The Lairage during January to April 2007 be supported in principle subject to satisfactory arrangements being made between NHDC and the promoter;
- (4) That a vote of thanks be recorded in respect of the work undertaken by the Markets Manager to improve the usage of Hitchin Market.

65. SAVINGS AND GROWTH BUDGETS FOR 2007- 2008 AND FIVE YEAR FINANCIAL FORECAST

The Head of Financial Services (HFS) advised the Committee that the list of savings and growth items as presented at Appendices 1 to 4 had been presented to Cabinet at its meeting held on 17 October 2006 (Minute 87 refers) and referred the Committee to Appendix 5 which detailed Cabinet's comments made on 17 October as per the savings proposals.

Cabinet had also requested that the views of all Members should be sought on the savings and growth proposals for 2007-2008 via Members workshops (18 and 19 October 2006), Scrutiny Committee, PARC, Area Committees, Local Strategic Partnerships and Business Ratepayers during October and November 2006. The HFS advised that Cabinet also resolved that allowance for growth should be included in the annual savings target capped at £250,000 per annum and that items identified for savings and growth from 2008/2009 should be re-evaluated each year.

The HFS provided a comprehensive review and summary of the background and issues in preparation of the Savings and Growth Proposals for 2007-2008 with specific reference to the Revised budget forecast 2006-2007 onwards (Table 1) and the Growth Items analysed over Strategic Objectives (Table 2) compared to the ten key factors within the Councils Capital Strategy used to assess projects submitted by each Service. The HFS confirmed that in addition to the checks above all proposals for savings and growth made by Heads of Service were reviewed by the Challenge Board.

The Committee reviewed Appendices 1 and 2 and noted the total savings options of £770K, and at Appendix 3 the revenue growth proposals of £285.8K plus the capital proposals listed at appendix 4. The HFS advised the Committee that the net effect of the revised budget strategy and the savings and growth proposals was an outstanding £233K still to be found in order to achieve a balanced budget based on an assumed 4.5 per cent Council Tax increase.

The HFS concluded his report by stating that the outstanding £233K may well increase due to negotiations awaited on Concessionary Fares and Meals on Wheels Service, together with the need to balance the budget by reducing expenditure, increasing incomes from fees and charges, using balances and increasing Council Tax.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Financial Services for the details provided on the savings and growth proposals for 2007-2008 and invited comments and suggestions from the Committee. The Committee reviewed every Savings and Growth item and during the debate it was agreed that there might be savings that could be justified as in the case of services that should be provided by Hertfordshire County Council. However, the Committee agreed in all such cases that every avenue of alternative financial support should be investigated before the withdrawal of financial support.

RESOLVED: That the information provided in the report and appendices of the Head of Financial Services be noted;

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET: That Cabinet at its meeting to be held on 19 December 2006 be requested to take into consideration the following comments and recommendations made by the Hitchin Committee:

- (1) SG9: Reduced noise call out service – This service should be maintained at current levels;
- (2) SG10: Empty homes officer – This post should be retained until alternative ways of managing this service are established;
- (3) SG13: Alternate week collection of residual waste – This change should not be introduced until there had been significant public consultation on the Healthy and Safety issues concerned with the recycling of household waste.

- (4) SG15: Reduction of Area Committee Budgets – This was considered to be untenable as non – expenditure of budgets as in the case of JMP Discretionary Budgets was outside Area Committee influence;
- (5) SG16: Change delivery approach of holiday play schemes – This authority must have 100 per cent commitment to children and young people in North Herts and no changes should be made until a better alternative of service provision was available;
- (6) SG17: Historic Building Grants – Although the Head of Financial Services confirmed that there had been little take up of grant the Committee proposed no change until an alternative and appropriate source of grant aid had been found;
- (7) SG18: Handyperson/Securing scheme – The Committee expressed total opposition to this proposal;
- (8) SG20: Deletion of contribution of subsidised bus routes – The Committee acknowledged that this was a Herts County Council Service Provision but regretted the removal of this subsidy which should not be made until all alternative means of funding had been investigated;
- (9) SG21: Deletion of contribution to dial – a – ride – The Committee agreed that this cost should be maintained as the deterioration of the bus services meant that this was a valuable service to many people. The Committee accepted that NHDC should not ultimately support a County Council service and all alternative avenues of financial support should be investigated before a final decision was taken;
- (10) SG23: Increase residents parking permit charges – any increases should be limited to annual inflation only;
- (11) SG25: Introduction of fees for pre – planning application advice – The Committee considered that this was regressive and questioned how this increase would be introduced;
- (12) SG29: Pest control fees increase – The Committee wished to have more information from Environmental Health on the use of this service before accepting the proposed increases.

REASON FOR DECISIONS:

To allow the Hitchin Committee make comments and recommendations on the proposed savings and growth bids for 2007-2008.

66. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The Committee heard oral presentations as follows:

Application Ref. 06/01197/1 – Land to the rear of and including 134 to 150 evens, Grove Road, Hitchin.

Mr Peacock spoke as an objector.

Mr S. Boddy spoke as the applicant's representative.

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

SCHEDULE

Reference Number	Description of Development and Location	Decision
06/01197/1	Land to the rear of and including 134 to 150 evens, Grove Road, Hitchin, SG4 2 storey and part 3, 4 and 5 storey development to provide 39 one and 38 two bedroom flats; 4 two, 6 three and 10 four bedroom houses (total 97); 77 basement and 32 surface level garage/parking spaces. New vehicular and pedestrian access adjacent River Purwell; landscaping and ancillary works. (as amended by plans received 13.09.06 and 16.10.06)	Refused (see (a)below)

(a) That with regard to planning application reference 06/01197/1 that permission be **REFUSED** for the following reasons:

- (1) By reason of the overall height and scale of the principal block of flats, that part of the development would not satisfactorily integrate into, nor enhance, the established character and urban form of the locality. The proposal would thus not conform with Policies 1 and 26 of the District Local Plan No. 2 with Alterations nor the advice given in the Government's Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 and Planning Policy Statement 1.
- (2) The layout makes inadequate provision for private open amenity space to serve the occupiers of the proposed flats and rear garden space for the proposed townhouses. The proposal would thus not conform with Policies 1 and 57 of the District Local Plan No. 2 with Alterations.
- (3) The application does not provide appropriate measures to encourage the use of modes of transport other than the private motor car.

67. PLANNING APPEALS - UPDATE

The Principal Planning Officer confirmed that one appeal had been lodged since the meeting of this Committee held on 28 September 2006.

Appellant: M. A. Ashik
Address: 14 Redhill Road, Hitchin.
Description: Extension of trading hours to include 12 noon to 10 p.m. Sundays.
Ref. 06/00983/1
Procedure: Written representations.

The Principal Planning Officer confirmed that no appeals had been determined since the meeting of this Committee held on 28 September 2006.

68. CHAMPION NEWS

The Community Development Officer (CDO) commenced with a summary of the recent meeting on 26 September of Ickleford Road residents concerning traffic management and advised the Committee that a consensus had been reached by the residents who attended the meeting for the following traffic management schemes:

1. A one way system for vehicles proceeding along Ickleford Road from the roundabout at the junction of Bancroft, Fishponds Road and Nightingale Road to the junction of Ickleford Road with Bearton Road and Periwinkle Lane;
2. Removal of single yellow lines on both sides of Ickleford Road – this to allow parking on both sides of Ickleford Road by residents through a residents' parking scheme;
3. The introduction of a Controlled Parking Zone for the residents of Ickleford Road.

The residents expressed a wish at the meeting held on 26 September 2006 that the three proposals should be implemented as a group and not individually.

The Chairman confirmed that a liaison officer for NHDC/NHHP had been appointed on a temporary basis and a short debate ensued on how to proceed with the proposals raised by the residents in Ickleford Road. The Committee confirmed that they fully supported the aims of the residents of Ickleford Road to implement traffic management issues to ensure a better quality of life and it was agreed that these traffic management issues should be referred to the NHDC/NHHP liaison officer in the first instance. The Committee noted that all three requests would ultimately be subject to Traffic Regulation Orders and that public consultation of residents in Ickleford Road would be necessary and organised by NHDC prior to the implementation of a Controlled Parking Zone in Ickleford Road. The Committee hoped that these traffic management control measures would be implemented as soon as possible and together as one improvement scheme. It was also agreed that a report on the viability of the three proposals should be presented to the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee on 12 December 2006.

The CDO referred the Committee to Appendix A which included the management plan for Butts Close as provided by the Countryside Management Service. The CDO confirmed that the NHDC Senior Tree Officer and Countryside Management Service had recommended replacement of the Horse Chestnut Avenue by Italian Alder as the proposal to plant Common Alder and Horse Chestnut was not viable as Horse Chestnut trees were affected by pest and disease. The CDO advised the Committee that there was a considerable work programme planned for the pond and adjacent land, willow trees next to the pond, oxygenating plants in the pond and reed beds in the pond to filter out nutrients.

The Committee reviewed the cost estimates (Appendix A) prepared for the Greenspace Action Plan for Butts Close totalling £10,636,40p and agreed to support this important improvement scheme for Butts Close by re-confirming a grant of £1500 from the Visioning Budget as a contribution towards the tree re-planting costs.

The CDO referred the Committee to Appendix B which detailed the Project Plan for the Triangle Area Design Brief and advised that this plan had been passed to the Triangle Residents Group for their comments. The CDO confirmed that the Design Brief had been prepared by the Planning Policy team and following a request from Members agreed to request that adequate officer support was provided to the Triangle residents as progress was made towards Step 12 – Publication of the Design Brief planned for January 2008.

The CDO provided a summary of the following activities: Sports Pavilions, Westmill Groundwork Youth Project; Walsworth Community Centre, Voice of Hitchin Youth, Hitchin Museum, Hitchin Christmas Lights and Friends of Walsworth Common. The CDO confirmed that a preliminary site meeting with representatives of Hitchin Allotments association had taken place on 24 October with the next meeting planned for 6 November at NHDC Council offices.

The Chairman confirmed that she had formally opened the Skateboard Park at King George V Playing Fields on 24 October 2006. The skateboarders were very pleased with the new facilities and the Chairman thanked the CDO and officers for their hard work in achieving this play facility.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the information provided by the Community Development Officer on activities since the last meeting of the Hitchin Committee held on 28 September 2006 be noted;
- (2) That this Committee supports the proposals made by the residents of Ickleford Road, Hitchin to meet the need for traffic management and road safety;

- (3) That the NHDC/NHHP liaison officer be requested to meet with the North Herts District Manager – Hertfordshire Highways as soon as possible to discuss the viability of the following proposals:
 - (a) Implement a one way system of travel for all traffic in Ickleford Road from the Bancroft, Fishponds Road, Nightingale roundabout to the junction with Bearton Road, Periwinkle Lane and Whitehurst Avenue;
 - (b) The removal of single yellow lines along both sides of Ickleford Road to allow parking in Ickleford Road by residents, through the implementation of a Traffic Regulation Order;
 - (c) That following public consultation a Controlled Parking Zone be implemented in Ickleford Road via a Traffic Regulation Order for all residents with vehicles in Ickleford Road.
- (4) That following discussions with the North Herts District Manager the NHDC/NHHP liaison officer be requested to provide a written report to the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held on 12 December 2006 concerning the viability of the following proposals:
- (5) That subject to viability of a CPZ in Ickleford Road the Principal Engineer at NHDC with responsibility for Controlled Parking Zones be requested to undertake the necessary arrangements for a public consultation of the residents in Ickleford Road to assess the need for a Controlled Parking Zone;
- (6) That the Principal Engineer at NHDC with responsibility for Controlled Parking Zones be requested to advise the Chairman of the Hitchin Committee with details of the funding source for this public consultation;
- (7) That a grant of £1500.00 be awarded from the Hitchin Visioning Budget for 2006-2007 towards the re-planting costs of trees in Butts Close, Hitchin.

REASON FOR DECISIONS:

To ensure that the Hitchin Committee are kept informed of the work of the Community Development Officer and support the local community for appropriate traffic management and road safety schemes.

69. ANNUAL GRANTS, DEVELOPMENT, DISCRETIONARY AND VISIONING BUDGET 2006/2007

The Committee considered the current expenditure and balance of the Annual Grants, Development, Discretionary and Visioning budget for 2006 – 2007.

RESOLVED: That the expenditure, allocations, and balance of the current 2006-07 Development budget, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be noted;

REASON FOR DECISION:

To advise the Hitchin Committee of funds remaining for disbursement in the year 2006/2007.

70. GRANT APPLICATION – HITCHIN BOYS SCHOOL

RESOLVED: That a grant of £500 be awarded to Hitchin Boys School as a contribution towards the costs of improving the changing facilities at the school which are used by a large number of community groups, and allocated from each Ward Discretionary Budget (5 x £100 = £500).

71. HITCHIN TOWN CENTRE MANAGER – UPDATE

The Hitchin Town Centre Manager (HTCM) advised the Committee that he had made visits to Evesham and Bury St. Edmunds on aspects of Market Towns and had been surprised each time to be the only representative from Hertfordshire.

On his visit to the East of England Agency he received confirmation of £400,000 for asset development throughout our region. The HTCM wished to confirm that the Hitchin Business Community were still interested in a Community Development Centre but more importantly the proposed developments in Stevenage and Letchworth Garden City and the long delays over Churchgate had given cause for concern as to the future of Hitchin as a retail and business centre.

The HTCM confirmed that his office had taken on many of the information services previously offered by the local authority and was in effect operating as a 'one stop shop'. With this development the HTCM proposed an increase in the Service Level Agreement in order to take on additional activities e.g. Markets, public conveniences, permits for non-licensed premises using the footway and A boards. The HTCM also proposed a Service Level Agreement with Hertfordshire Constabulary where the Hitchin Town Centre Initiative could provide assistance in Crime and Disorder matters

The Chairman thanked the HTCM for the brief description of activities and matters of importance to the Hitchin Business Community and with the Committee's agreement requested that the HTCM provide a more detailed resume of his presentation via an Information Note.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the information provided by the Hitchin Town Centre Manager be noted;
- (2) That the Hitchin Town Centre Manager be requested to present an Information Note to the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held on 12 December 2006 with details of his visits to other market towns, attendance at regional conferences and details of possible expansion in the Hitchin retail sector;
- (3) That the Head of Community Development and Cultural Services be requested to provide assistance to the Hitchin Town Centre Manager on all aspects of asset development in Hitchin.

The meeting closed at 10. 06 p.m.

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Chairman