

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

HITCHIN COMMITTEE

Meeting held at Benslow Music Trust, Benslow Lane, Hitchin,
on 12 December 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 and Sarah Wren.*

IN ATTENDANCE: *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 Martin Stears joined the meeting at 8.26 p.m.

72. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

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

The Chairman welcomed the representatives of Hitchin Market Traders – Agenda item 5 – Public Participation.

AGENDA ITEM 6: HITCHIN TOWN HALL – THE FUTURE

The Chairman advised those present that this item had been deferred.

PARKING ON GRASS VERGES – ENFORCEMENT ISSUES

The Chairman read out the following statement from the Head of Housing and Environmental Health:

'The grounds maintenance manager has been tasked with collating a list of verge parking hot – spots across the district and to identify the most appropriate solution for each site. This work, once completed will provide an overview on the scope of this problem and to give an indication of the potential costs of the solutions identified; it will also identify the responsibilities of Herts County Council. Regrettably the grounds maintenance manager remains on long term sick leave and the work has not progressed'.

Following this announcement the Committee expressed their extreme disappointment at the lack of progress on this matter and whether any risk analysis was in place to cover the long term absence of the grounds maintenance manager. The Committee noted that there had been a considerable amount of progress in recording hot-spots and with this in mind the Committee considered that it would be appropriate to request a report from the Head of Planning and Building Control on verge parking hot – spots to the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held on 23 January with specific reference to the problems in Hitchin, and details of the staff cover in place for the above mentioned officer.

73. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor R.A.C.Thake.

74. MINUTES – 31 October 2006

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2006 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

75. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Agenda Item 8 – Planning Applications

06/02384/1 – 106 Bedford Road, Hitchin SG5 2UE

Councillor R. Shakespeare – Smith declared a prejudicial interest as he was a near neighbour to the applicant and confirmed that he would leave the room for the duration of this item.

Agenda Item 11 – Grant application – Hitchin Fairtrade Steering Group

Councillor Martin Stears declared a prejudicial interest in that he was a member of the Hitchin Fairtrade Steering Group and that he would leave the room for the duration of this item.

Agenda Item 11 – Grant application – Walsworth Festival 2007

Councillors B. Lovewell and R. Shakespeare-Smith declared a prejudicial interest in this item as they were Treasurer and Secretary respectively for the Walsworth Festival 2007 and they would leave the room for the duration of this item.

76. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – HITCHIN MARKET TRADERS

The representative of the Hitchin Market traders thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee.

The representative referred to recent coverage in the local media about Hitchin Market and the market traders had been very concerned at the reporting of the subsidised stall rent scheme as 'a failure'. Previous representations to Hitchin Committee and Cabinet of the Business Plan prepared by the Market Traders Association advised that a six month period was insufficient to test adequately this subsidised scheme and that a period of two years was much more realistic. The representative stated that the increase in stall usage by both licensed traders and casual traders was vindication that the scheme was valid but to rely on an analysis period of six months was inadequate.

The representative urged the Committee to continue its support for the Hitchin Market and that the Committee should request that Cabinet regard this six month support as an initial phase and acknowledge the importance of markets throughout North Hertfordshire to everyone, not just market traders.

The Chairman thanked the Representative of the Market Traders for the presentation and proposed that any resolutions to Cabinet could be made at Agenda Item 7 – Feedback on Markets Performance, including the six month trial period of reduced rents for Tuesday and Saturday markets.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the representative of the Hitchin Markets Traders Association be thanked for the presentation;
- (2) That the Hitchin Committee supports the aims of the Hitchin Market Traders Association for the development and future viability of Hitchin Market.

77. HITCHIN TOWN HALL - THE FUTURE

The Chairman confirmed that this item was deferred until the meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held on 6 March 2006.

The following statement was provided by the Head of Community Development and Cultural Services:

'The report on the Hitchin Town Hall has been withdrawn as it was felt that it did materially add to the Council's present approach to the future of the Town Hall. The outline needs analysis has been completed and the market testing for both a continuation of existing use and also for a change of use will soon commence. It is anticipated that this will take a minimum of six months to complete, allowing sufficient

time for advertising in local press/trade journals, allowing potential operators to view the property and submit their expressions of interest, short listing, interviewing, seeking references, and selecting a preferred partner. When this work has been concluded and a determination of the best option has been made, a further report on the Town Hall will be prepared. It is anticipated that this will be in early summer 2007'.

Following this announcement the Committee were astounded that it would be some six months before any report on the future of Hitchin Town Hall would be available for review. The Committee were very disappointed that no progress had been made for nearly 12 months towards the conversion of Hitchin Town Hall into a Community Asset Centre and remarked on the lost opportunity for development when grants had been assured subject to funding from this authority. Also, that the statement above inferred that a development option for the Town Hall would be presented to Hitchin Committee without any contributions from Hitchin Councillors. The Committee were unable to accept this delay and requested that the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Environmental Health convey these concerns to the Head of Community Development and Cultural Issues, and ensure that an information note be presented to the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held on 23 January with a comprehensive update on all aspects of the statement above.

78. FEEDBACK ON MARKETS PERFORMANCE INCLUDING THE SIX MONTH TRIAL PERIOD OF REDUCED RENTS FOR TUESDAY AND SATURDAY MARKETS

The Chairman advised the Committee that at her request the Cabinet report on the above had been made available to the Hitchin Committee for comment and suggestions prior to the next meeting of Cabinet on 19 December.

The Committee reviewed the report and specifically the 3 Options at Appendix 1 for consideration by Cabinet and following a robust discussion:

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET

- (1) That the Hitchin Committee strongly supported the continuation of the reduced stall rents at Hitchin Market for at least a further 12 months commencing 23 January 2007 (Option 3);
- (2) That the request for at least an additional 12 months financial support should not preclude any decisions concerning the outcome of the Markets future Management arrangements;
- (3) That Cabinet be aware of the need for continued support to Hitchin Market and the other markets in North Hertfordshire to preserve the essential role of markets in the District's business community.

REASON FOR DECISIONS:

To allow continued support for Hitchin Market and the promotion of Markets in North Hertfordshire.

79. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The Committee heard oral presentations as follows:

Application Ref. 06/02007/1 – Brookers Yard and Suzuki and Peter Fish premises off Paynes Park, Hitchin.

Mr C. Honey spoke as an objector.

Mr S. Boddey spoke as the applicants representative.

Application Ref. 06/02384/1 – 106 Bedford Road, Hitchin.

Mr R. Moore spoke as the applicants agent

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
06/02187/1	<p>68 Walsworth Road, Hitchin, SG4 9SX Three storey buildings comprising 6 two bedroom flats and 6 one bedroom flats with semi-basement parking for 11 cars and landscaped amenity deck at first floor level; vehicular access as existing via Walsworth Road.</p>	<p>Conditional Permission (see (a) below)</p>
06/02007/1	<p>Brookers Yard, and Suzuki and Peter Fish premises off Paynes Park, Hitchin, SG5 2, 3 and 4 storey buildings together with conversion of part of existing Carling Building and Building B to provide 141 residential units (23 one bedroom and 102 two bedroom flats; 1 one bedroom, 12 two bedroom and 3 three bedroom houses). Basement parking for 175 cars and cycle storage. Use of part of existing Carling building for retail purposes (362 sq.m.). Two separate points of vehicular access via Paynes Park following closure of existing. Service access to new ground floor loading bay rear of Brookers via Market place. Landscaping and ancillary works.</p>	<p>Conditional Permission (see (b)below)</p>
06/02054/1CAC	<p>Brookers Yard, and Suzuki and Peter Fish premises off Paynes Park, Hitchin, SG5 Demolition of commercial buildings and structures preparatory to residential redevelopment of the site.</p>	<p>Conditional Permission (see(b) and (c) below)</p>
06/02384/1	<p>106 Bedford Road, Hitchin, SG5 2UE Detached dwelling under construction with two parking spaces, omission of integral garage, installation of rear roof lights to facilitate use of roof space as an attic room. (As variation of planning permission ref. 05/10743/1 granted 16.01.06).</p>	<p>Conditional Permission (as per report)</p>

(a) That with regard to planning application reference 06/02187/1 permission be **GRANTED** as per the report of the Head of Planning and Building Control with Condition 4 amended to read as follows:

- (4) Before any part of the development hereby approved is first commenced full details of the proposed soft and hard landscaping of the open amenity desk, to include details of screen planting and/or fencing along the full length of the rear boundary and eastern side boundary, shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure the submitted details are sufficiently comprehensive to enable proper consideration to be given to the appearance of the completed development and to safeguard potential future overlooking of the adjoining site.

- (b) *Note:*
- i. The first vote to approve the officer's recommendation for planning permission was lost;
 - ii. Following the first vote the Principal Planning Officer provided additional information to the Committee concerning the application;
 - iii. The second vote approved the officer's recommendation to grant planning permission.
- (c) That with regard to planning application reference 06/02007/1 in the event of the applicants first entering into a planning obligation under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 with North Hertfordshire District Council and Hertfordshire County Council permission be **GRANTED** as per the conditions set out in the report of the Head of Planning and Building Control with the following items as part of the Section 106 agreement:
- (1) To secure the provision of affordable housing in accordance with Policy 29A of the District Local Plan No 2 with Alterations or such other arrangements as may be agreed under Planning Policy Statement 3 - Housing and to secure their permanent occupation for local people in need;
 - (2) To make financial contributions towards County Council facilities of £28,820 (library facilities), £47,960 (youth and childcare facilities), £53,786 (secondary education provision);
 - (3) To make a financial contribution of £500 per dwelling towards sustainable transport measures within the area;
 - (4) To make a financial contribution of £5000 towards improvements to the Smithson Recreation Ground and the Reginald Hine Memorial Garden;
 - (5) To make a financial contribution of £45,250 towards the District Council's Town Centre Project for a children and young peoples' centre;
 - (6) The provision of fire hydrants.

And the two following additional conditions:

- (22) Prior to the first occupation of any of the dwellings hereby approved, a pedestrian link shall be provided between the adjoining sheltered housing development, Whittings Court, and Market Place in accordance with details that shall have been previously submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To facilitate a convenient pedestrian link with the Market Place for the benefit of the occupiers of the adjoining sheltered housing development.

- (23) Notwithstanding the elevational details shown on the plans for Blocks J and H, the windows, doors and balconies facing the internal street shall be constructed in accordance with details that shall have been previously submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure the finished design and overall appearance of the principal elevation to these two blocks are carried out in a visually sympathetic manner.

80. **PLANNING APPEALS - UPDATE**

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 31 October 2006.

81. CHAMPION NEWS

The Community Development Officer (CDO) provided an update of all activities undertaken since the last meeting held on 31 October 2006. The CDO made particular reference to the following: Hitchin Allotments, two plots could be made available at Burford Way subject to site clearance; Sainsbury trolleys, an enforcement shopping trolley enforcement scheme has been set up with a performance target of removing abandoned trolleys within 48 hours. The CDO advised the Committee that Sainsbury in Hitchin had yet to join the scheme and that she would write with encouragement as Sainsbury in Letchworth had joined the scheme; Controlled Parking Zones, the three areas in Hitchin proposed for Caps (Triangle, Chiltern Road and The Avenue) had suffered a long delay both in public consultation and implementation. The committee considered these delays as unacceptable and requested an updating report to the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held on 23 January 2007. The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Environmental Health was able to advise the Committee that due to the Christmas/New Year break advertising the schemes in The Avenue and Chiltern Road in the local press would be in January 2007. The Committee noted that officers were considering the use of Traffic Regulation Orders to replace Caps

The CDO referred the Committee to Paragraph 3.13 and Appendix A which gave the results of recent discussions between the NHDC/NHHP liaison officer and the North Herts. District Manager concerning the cost estimates and viability of traffic management and road safety measures requested at previous meetings of the Hitchin Committee. The Chairman invited comments from the Committee and following discussion of each item agreed the recommendations listed at (7) below for consideration at the next meeting of the Joint Member Panel to be held on 29 January 2007.

The CDO concluded her report to propose presentations to the Committee in the new year by the Gurdwara Temple from Wilbury Road and The Voice of Hitchin Youth. The CDO advised the Committee that the Gadara Temple had issued an invitation to host a Committee meeting at a future date in 2007.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the information provided by the Community Development Officer on activities since the last meeting of the Hitchin Committee held on 31 October 2006 be noted;
- (2) That the information provided by Hertfordshire Constabulary and Hertfordshire Highways concerning the traffic management and road safety issues in Ickleford road be noted;
- (3) That the Community Development Officer be requested to meet with the residents of Ickleford Road and consider the proposal to await the outcomes of the Bearton Controlled Parking Zone area study;
- (4) That the Bearton Controlled Parking Zone be considered for inclusion in the Corporate strategic approach to the implementation of parking management schemes;
- (5) That the Head of Planning and Building Control be requested to provide an updating report on the Controlled Parking Zone Schemes for the Triangle Area, The Avenue and Chiltern Road, with an assessment of completion dates and the use of Traffic Regulation Orders as a replacement for CPZs to the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held on 23 January 2007.

- (6) **Install a pedestrian phase at Walsworth crossroad traffic lights**
That the Head of Planning and Building Control be requested to make urgent representations to Hertfordshire Highways and Hertfordshire County Council for the Hitchin Transport Plan to be reviewed in order that it can deal with the existing traffic problems within Hitchin and those that may face Hitchin with the development of the Local Development Framework.

(7) ***RECOMMENDED TO NORTH HERTS HIGHWAYS PARTNERSHIP***

To note the resolution made at 81 (6) above and the following comments and suggestions made by the Hitchin Committee at the meeting held on 12 December 2006 for the following schemes:

Scheme

- (2) **Change junction of Willian Road with Purwell Lane**
That the Walsworth/A505 junction ((6) above) and the Willian Road/Purwell Lane junction be included as a wider traffic modelling exercise for the area and be promoted through the Local Transport Plan and Local Development Framework process;
- (3) **Resurface Westmill Road**
That this scheme should be included in the revised Integrated Works Programme (Draft 2) to be considered by the Joint Member Panel at its meeting to be held on 29 January 2007;
- (4) **Resurface John Barker Place**
That this scheme should be included in the revised Integrated Works Programme (Draft 2) to be considered by the Joint Member Panel at its meeting to be held on 29 January 2007;
- (5) **Vehicle Activated sign (Stevenage Road) near the junction with Sunnyside on the Hitchin – Stevenage side of the A602**
That the North Herts District Manager be requested to assess this scheme with schemes (9) and (10) and advise the Hitchin Committee at its meeting to be held on 23 January 2007 which of the three schemes provided the best matched criteria for a Vehicle Activated Sign.
- (7) **The Maples and Stevenage road junction – extension of double yellow lines.**
a. That the pre-allocated funds of £3000 in the Highbury Ward Discretionary Budget for 2006-2007 be allocated as a fifty per cent contribution to the estimated costs of extending the double yellow lines at this location.
b. That this scheme be placed in the revised Integrated Works Programme (Draft 2) to be considered by the Joint Member Panel at its meeting to be held on 29 January 2007.
- (8) **A no right turn from Stevenage road into Sunnyside**
That the pre-allocated funds of £4000 in the Highbury Ward Discretionary Budget for 2006-2007 be allocated as a fifty per cent contribution to the estimated costs (e.g. investigation, consultation and TRO) of prohibiting a right turn at this road junction.
- (9) **Vehicle activated sign adjacent to Our Lady's Primary School, Old Hale Way.**
That the North Herts District Manager be requested to assess this scheme with schemes (5) and (10) and advise the Hitchin Committee at its meeting to be held on 23 January 2007 which of the three schemes provided the best matched criteria for a Vehicle Activated Sign.

(10) Vehicle activated sign in St. Michael's road.

That the North Herts District Manager be requested to assess this scheme with schemes (5) and (9) and advise the Hitchin Committee at its meeting to be held on 23 January 2007 which of the three schemes provided the best matched criteria for a Vehicle Activated Sign

(11) St. Michael's Road – New roundabout

That the North Herts District Manager be requested to review the physical construction criteria in respect of the new roundabout at the junction of St. Michael's Road and Wedgewood Road as both Members and local residents were convinced that this new roundabout had been constructed in a position that affects the traffic flow.

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.

82. 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.

83. GRANT APPLICATION – HITCHIN FAIRTRADE STEERING GROUP

RESOLVED: That a grant of £507 be awarded to Hitchin Fairtrade Steering Group as a contribution towards the costs of publicising events and planning of events to celebrate Hitchin's Fairtrade Status in 2006/2007. Each Member agreed to contribute the sum of £39 from their individual Discretionary Ward Budget.

84. GRANT APPLICATION – WALSWORTH FESTIVAL 2007

RESOLVED: That a grant of £2000 be awarded in principle from the 2007-2008 Hitchin Discretionary Ward Budget as a contribution towards the costs of promotion and organising the Walsworth Festival in 2007.

85. HITCHIN TOWN CENTRE MANAGER – UPDATE

The Hitchin Town Centre Manager HTCM wished to place on record his thanks and those of the Hitchin Business Community for the exemplary efforts of the Property Services Engineer based at Letchworth in restoring the Market Place Christmas tree and lights to full operation in a very short space of time.

The HTCM apologised to the Chairman and committee for a lack of an Information Note as per Minute 71 (2) of the meeting held on 31 October 2006. The HTCM proposed and it was agreed that it might be more appropriate to provide a summary of his annual report at the AGM of the Town Centre Initiative to the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee. The HTCM also made a request that the vacancy of a Senior liaison officer between the Initiative and NHDC must be filled as soon as possible as the recent meeting of the Hitchin Initiative Steering Group with the Hitchin Chairman and Vice-Chairman, the Chief Executive and Strategic Director for Customer Services and other senior officers which provided an indication of how partnerships could and should work.

The Committee noted that the cost of Christmas lights and street decorations was nearly covered and that a local benefactor had very kindly agreed to underwrite the costs of a new water fountain in the River Hiz (at St. Marys Church). The HTCM advised that there would be a crime reduction exhibition in Market Place on 15 December and that local funding had been sourced for the provision of a football strip for a Youth Team from the Hitchin Area that may wish to play a Police 'select' team. The Committee were very pleased to receive confirmation of the introduction of Taxi Marshalls on a Friday and Saturday night in Hitchin initially located at Bancroft Taxi Rank. The HTCM advised that a visit had been made to a possible youth venue above the Iceland premises in Churchgate and that he would be able to update Members soon on progress.

The HTCM gave a brief summary of his visit to Newmarket to attend a Market Towns Seminar where an emphasis had been placed on partnership working as such partnerships were eligible for significant amounts of funding available in the Eastern Region.

In conclusion the HTCM touched on the problems facing Hitchin Market and advised the Committee that significant investment was necessary to bring the Market into an attractive venue for visitors to Hitchin and that an alternative market management arrangement might be the best way forward. This also included the quality of stalls and the quality of goods for sale. The delays in the decisions about the future of Hitchin Town Hall had caused a great deal of unease amongst local business entrepreneurs and several had indicated that they would not be involved in the future due to previous indecision by NHDC.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the information provided by the Hitchin Town Centre Manager be noted;
- (2) That the Hitchin Town Centre Manager be requested to provide a copy of his annual report to the Hitchin Town Centre Initiative AGM in the form of an information note to the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held on 23 January 2007.

The meeting closed at 9.49 p.m.

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Chairman