

# NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

## HITCHIN COMMITTEE

Meeting held at Benslow Music Trust, Benslow Lane, Hitchin,  
on 12 June 2007 at 7.30p.m.

### MINUTES

**PRESENT:** *Councillors: Judi Billing (Chairman), Mrs A.G. Ashley, David Billing, Clare Body, Paul Clark, Joan Kirby, Bernard Lovewell, Alan Millard Lawrence Oliver, R. Shakespeare- Smith and Martin Stears.*

**IN ATTENDANCE:** *Patrick Candler – Head of Community Development and Cultural Services,  
Margaret Bracey - Community Development Officer,  
Nigel Schofield – Committee Administrator.*

#### 4. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The Chairman welcomed Councillors Clare Body and Alan Millard as new members of the Hitchin Committee.

The Chairman thanked everyone who attended the Hitchin Town Talk.

The Chairman proposed and it was agreed to offer a Vote of Thanks in respect of the work carried out by Derek Sheard as Vice-Chairman of the Hitchin Committee and the contribution by him and Sarah Wren to Community Development in Hitchin during their tenure as Hitchin District Councillors.

The Chairman advised all those present that the dates and venues of the remaining meetings of the Hitchin Committee in 2007-2008 would be determined at Agenda Item 7.

#### 5. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Deepak Sangha and R.A.C. Thake.

#### 6. OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman accepted two items for discussion as action was requested sooner than the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held on 26 July 2007.

##### 1. FAIRTRADE

Councillor Martin Stears advised the Committee that Hitchin had been a Fairtrade Town ( the first in Hertfordshire) for more than 12 months. However, a previous request for road signage at Hitchin Gateways had not been met and the Committee requested that every effort should be made to install such street architecture as soon as possible.

**RESOLVED:** That the Community Development Officer be requested to discuss with the NHDC – North Hertfordshire Highways liaison officer how these signs could be ordered and installed as soon as possible at the Hitchin Gateways.

##### 2. HITCHIN MARKET

The Chairman referred Members to a representation made by Hitchin Market Traders during Hitchin Town Talk which preceded the Committee meeting. The Market Traders had requested that discussions should be held with officers and Members in order to improve and promote communication between all parties. The Market Traders also requested that their Business Development Plan should be reviewed by officers and Cabinet.

**RESOLVED:** That the Projects Manager – Leisure and the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and E Government be requested to liaise with the Hitchin Committee Chairman in order to facilitate communications between all parties, and seek the way forward to discuss business opportunities.

**RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:** That Cabinet at its meeting to be held on 26 June 2007 be requested to review the Business Development Plan previously presented by the Hitchin Market Traders Association and consider again the proposals made in the Business Development Plan for the financial viability of Hitchin Market.

**7. MINUTES – 17 APRIL 2007**

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting held on 17 April 2007 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

**8. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

**Agenda Item 9 – Grant Application – 3<sup>rd</sup> Hitchin Scouts**

Councillor Bernard Lovewell declared a personal interest as he was a member of Hitchin Scouts Council, and that he would answer questions about the financing of scout groups in Hitchin, reserve the right to speak, remain in the room but, would not vote.

**9. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – CADWELL LANE**

The representative of Cadwell Lane residents thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee.

The increase in the number and frequency of 40 tonne scrap metal lorries using Cadwell Lane had a detrimental effect on the quality of life for local residents. It was made very clear that the environmental issues such as noise, dust, air quality were causing many problems for local residents and the Committee were advised of the strength of feeling on this issue, with reference to Hitchin becoming 'Scrap City'.

The representative referred in her presentation to the NHDC Vision 'Making North Hertfordshire a vibrant place to live, work and prosper' and the five strategic objectives made by North Hertfordshire District Council i.e. Sustainable Communities; Safer Communities; Healthier Communities; Equal Communities; Prosperous Communities and Satisfied Communities. The Committee were given examples of how neither the Vision or the key objectives were being met for the residents in Cadwell Lane and adjacent roads and that it was beholden on the local authority to make every effort to meet these objectives even if certain aspects e.g. planning conditions set by Hertfordshire County Council were not the direct responsibility of NHDC.

The Committee were advised about: speeding lorries with no care for residents, the road and footway conditions were worse every day, police presence should be increased, a CCTV camera should be installed, residents' vehicles were damaged by fallen raw scrap debris, raw scrap debris also fell into gardens, residents had sleep deprivation due to a near 24/7 operation, an excessive amount of dust, unable to open windows, will heavy vehicle damage to Cadwell Lane cause breakage in the gas pipeline under the road surface?, fire and rescue service vehicles could be delayed by parked up raw scrap vehicles, house values are falling and above all Cadwell Lane had become an undesirable place in which to live – why should these people be at risk?

The representative urged the Committee to take whatever action was necessary to alleviate conditions for local residents and explained that the widening of the Cadwell Lane, Grove Road, Wilbury Way and Woolgrove Road crossroads was not a sensible move 'it would only make the situation worse' and that NHDC should make representations to HCC and the Environment Agency to restrict any increase in the allowable tonnage to be processed each day and impose precise hours of operation together with rigid enforcement.

The Committee were unanimous in their support for the residents of Cadwell Lane and adjacent roads and all agreed that the current conditions for residents were appalling and intolerable and that every effort should be made to improve the quality of life for residents. The Chairman proposed and it was agreed that a Cadwell Lane Task and Finish Group should be set up to look at all aspects of the scrap metal operation both in the roads used by the 40 tonne lorries and at the raw scrap metal processing site. Also, to undertake a thorough review of the planning application process and conditions imposed by HCC when permission was granted for this scrap metal processing.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the representative of Cadwell Lane residents be thanked for the presentation;
- (2) That the Hitchin Committee strongly supported the views and representations made by the residents of Cadwell Lane and agreed that the movement of 40 tonne lorries in Cadwell Lane, Woolgrove Road, Grove Road, Cambridge Road and St. Michaels Road, Hitchin was intolerable for residents;
- (3) That a Cadwell Lane Task and Finish Group comprising: two Bearton Ward Members, two Walsworth Ward Members, one Highbury Ward Member and County Councillor David Billing be set up to scrutinise all aspects of the actions taken by Hertfordshire County Council when approving the movement of scrap material between the scrap depot in Cadwell Lane and the former goods yard at Hitchin Railway Station and the delivery of raw scrap to the processing plant in Cadwell Lane;
- (4) That the Cadwell Lane Task and Finish Group on completion of its scrutiny work be requested to liaise with the Scrutiny Officer in order to present their findings and recommendations to future meetings of the Hitchin Committee and Scrutiny Committee;
- (5) That the Licensing and Enforcement Manager be requested to undertake whatever action is necessary to control: noise, dust and air contamination in Cadwell Lane to ease the appalling conditions for the residents of Cadwell Lane Woolgrove Road, Grove Road, Cambridge Road and St. Michaels Road, Hitchin;
- (6) That a standing item ' Cadwell Lane – Environmental Issues' be included on the agenda for the next and subsequent Hitchin Committee meetings.

**REASON FOR DECISION**

To provide support to the residents of Cadwell Lane, Woolgrove Road, Cambridge Road and St. Michaels Road, Hitchin seeking to improve their quality of life and meet the Vision and key objectives of North Hertfordshire District Council i.e. A sustainable community, a safer community, a healthier community, an equal community, and a prosperous and satisfied community.

**9. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – WESTMILL YOUTH COMMUNITY PROJECT**

The Groundwork Officer from the Westmill Youth Community Project thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Hitchin Committee.

The Officer advised the Committee there were two age groups that participated in the Youth Community Project: 8 to 11 and 11plus and that over 60 youngsters had participated in football coaching, Street Dancing, Ice Skating and a DJ workshop. Another project undertaken by the young people of Westmill and which was very successful involved the ongoing aims of improving the environment of The Crescent with tree planting. Phase 1 of this scheme planted 22 trees and Phase 2 provided three small sculptures. The majority of residents in The Crescent were supportive and pleased with the efforts from 60 youngsters, unfortunately 3 trees had been broken but none since.

The Committee noted the short term objective of youth consultation of architectural plans with the North Herts Homes architect, creative art and health workshops and a Youth Council for Westmill Estate. The long term objectives would include North Herts Homes redevelopment of the Westmill Estate and was key to progress, plus the establishment of Westmill Youth and Childrens' Committee, together with the extension of links to schools.

The Oughton Ward Members were very pleased to commend the work of the Groundwork Officer and support must continue for this and future projects. The Committee welcomed the results to date of the project and proposed that the Groundwork Officer be invited to the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee with an indicative project plan including the role of youngsters, residents and the Westmill Community Association.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the Groundwork Officer from the Westmill Youth Community Project be thanked for the presentation;
- (2) That the Hitchin Committee strongly supported the proposal to proceed with more schemes and projects for the young people living on the Westmill Estate;
- (3) That the Groundwork Officer be requested to attend the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held on 26 July 2007 with an Action plan concerning proposed schemes and the interaction with local residents, Westmill Community Association, the Westmill Youth and Children Committee and North Hertfordshire Homes;

**REASON FOR DECISION**

To confirm the continued support of the Hitchin Committee for the Westmill Youth Community Project.

**10. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – SOUND BASE**

The representative of Sound Base Studios thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee.

The presentation covered the background and history of Sound Base studios and that the main aim of the charity was and remained to offer innovative music and art opportunities to young people – including amongst others young offenders, excluded school pupils, those at risk of offending and exclusion and those with learning disabilities. The representative advised the Committee that as a result of the activities at Sound Base there had been a fall in anti-social behaviour in North Herts, young people were involved in positive activities, there was valuable work experience and vocational qualifications gained in Hospitality and Leisure, support to young artists, improve and enhance social activities and an opportunity to address issues such as alcohol, drugs, sex and smoking.

The next step for Sound Base Studios was the establishment of a new permanent venue for 'Unique' as an under 18s dry music venue. This would provide varied and regular music, club and or comedy nights. Also, the 'Unique' project would complete the full learning circle for learners at Sound Base, develop performance skills, and hospitality and leisure skills. There would be a Unique Advisory Board to set up and run the venue and this alcohol and drug free social venue would encourage a healthy outlook and the ability to ignore peer pressure for under age drinking of alcohol and improve health and social issues.

The Committee endorsed the aims of Sound Base Studios and supported the proposal for the 'Unique' venue. The Committee noted that a considerable amount of financial support was required and that the Community Development Officer be requested to discuss with Sound Base Studios the presentation of a grant application to a future meeting of the Hitchin Committee.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the representative of Sound Base Studios be thanked for the presentation;

- (2) That the Hitchin Committee supported the work of Sound Base Studios for the 16 to 19 age group in Hitchin with reference to music technology and multimedia training and development for disaffected young people;
- (3) That the Hitchin Committee supports the proposal to set up an under 18 dry music venue entitled 'Unique';
- (4) That the Hitchin Committee agreed in principle the need to source financial support for the 'Unique' centre;
- (5) That the Community Development Officer be requested to liaise with the representatives of Sound Base Studios as to the presentation of a grant application concerning the 'Unique' centre.

#### **REASON FOR DECISION**

To confirm the continued support of the Hitchin Committee for Sound Base Studios.

#### **11. THE FUTURE OF HITCHIN TOWN HALL**

The Head of Community Development and Cultural Services (HCD) advised the Committee that the focus of work to date had been a market testing exercise whereby a third party through competitive tender could take over the management of Hitchin Town Hall as a community asset and either maintain the existing use or change the existing use, and specifically with no residual costs to the Council. The HCD confirmed that he would be presenting a report under Part 2 conditions to Cabinet on 26 June concerning the outcome of this market testing which was made in accordance with the Council's Financial Regulations and Contract Procurement rules.

The HCD referred the Committee to Appendices 1a and 1b which gave a summary of the uses of halls and venues in Hitchin and highlighted the community, cultural and leisure based activities available throughout Hitchin. The HCD advised the Committee that the market testing had identified surplus capacity at other community venues in Hitchin and that current usage of the Town Hall at core times was 34 to 41 per cent split between 70 per cent on community use and 30 per cent private use.

The Chairman thanked the HCD for his report and the Committee noted the results of the market testing and that three applicants had been short listed and invited to submit additional information (not received at the date of this meeting). However, the Chairman and the Committee expressed their extreme dissatisfaction at the lack of consultation with the Hitchin Committee and that the last time there had been any involvement was the occasion of the bid by Hitchin Town Centre Initiative in January 2006 to take over the Town Hall as a Community Asset. Also, the withdrawal of a report on Hitchin Town Hall to the meeting of this Committee in December 2006 had never been satisfactorily explained nor discussed with the Chairman. The Committee considered this lack of involvement to be unacceptable and for example at Appendix 2 bullet point 10 queried the strength of control retained by this authority on future usage of the Town Hall, also, if tenders were to be let by June 2007 this left no time for Hitchin Members to comment, and under the proposals for Area governance Area Committees would be consulted on the disposal of assets.

Notwithstanding the information in the report and the efforts by officers to implement the decision by Council on 9 February 2007 to transfer the Town Hall to a third party operator resulting in savings of £29,390 in 2006-2007 and £58,780 thereafter it was the unanimous view of the Committee that all Hitchin Councillors should be provided with the most up to date information on Hitchin Town Hall and be able to present comments, views and recommendations to the meeting of Cabinet to be held on 26 June 2007. Consequently, the Chairman proposed and it was unanimously agreed to convene a Special Meeting of the Hitchin Committee on Monday 25 June 2007. The HCD accepted this proposal and advised all present that this meeting would be held under Part 2 Conditions where under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting on the on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the contents of the report be noted;
- (2) That the Head of Community Development and Cultural Services should take due note of the extreme disappointment registered by the Hitchin Committee at the lack of consultation on all issues concerning the future of Hitchin Town Hall;
- (3) That the Hitchin Committee regretted the lack of opportunity in the report to make recommendations to Cabinet;
- (4) That the above comments and concerns be addressed at a special meeting of the Hitchin Committee (under Part 2 conditions) to be held on 25 June 2007 to allow the Head of Community Development and Cultural Services present a comprehensive report on all aspects of the future management arrangements of Hitchin Town Hall as a Community Asset;
- (5) That at the special meeting of the Hitchin Committee the considered views on the future of Hitchin Town Hall should be properly addressed and passed to the next meeting of Cabinet to be held on 26 June 2007 for consideration.

**REASON FOR DECISION**

To allow the Hitchin Committee participate and contribute as much as possible to the decision process concerning the future of Hitchin Town Hall as a Community Asset.

**12. HITCHIN COMMITTEE – THE WAY FORWARD**

The Committee were pleased to accept the recommendations made in the report concerning dates of meetings, new proposed venues (e.g. St. Michael's Community Centre, Westmill Community Centre, and Gudwara), the continuation of Hitchin Community Surgeries and that Town Talk would take place before each meeting and commence at 6.15 p.m.

At Paragraph 7.2 the Committee requested that the following be added to the list of potential agenda items:

13. Review of Service and Financial Process;
14. Allocation of Section 106 monies;
15. Closure of Hitchin High Street on nominated days and operating hours.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the dates of the next five meetings of the Hitchin Committee to be held in 2007-2008 be agreed as follows:  
Thursday 26 July 2007  
Tuesday 25 September 2007  
Tuesday 20 November 2007  
Tuesday 15 January 2008  
Tuesday 18 March 2008;
- (2) That the venues for the next five meetings be determined as soon as possible, with the meeting on 26 July 2007 to be held at Church House, Church Yard, Hitchin;
- (3) That Hitchin Town Talk will be held from 6.15 p.m. to 7.15 p.m. prior to each of the next five meetings of the Hitchin Committee;
- (4) That Hitchin Community Surgeries will take place in 2007-2008 as per the dates listed at Appendix A to the report and that Market Place will be used in preference to Church House – subject to weather conditions on the day;
- (5) That the Hitchin Committee noted the proposals for agenda items to be discussed at future meetings and that the Chairman would confirm such at the post Committee de-brief meeting to be held on 28 June 2007.

### **REASON FOR DECISIONS**

To allow the Hitchin Committee enter an enhanced phase of local community engagement following the removal of regulatory control items.

#### **13. CHAMPION NEWS**

The Community Development Officer (CDO) presented her report to the meeting and gave details *inter alia* on: Allotments, Walsworth Festival, Bancroft Gardens, Abandoned shopping trolleys, Westmill Youth project, Hitchin Town Centre Steering Group, Street Trading Permits and forthcoming events in Hitchin.

The Committee were pleased to note that the NHDC Policy Manager would now attend meetings of the Hitchin Town Steering Group as the NHDC representative. With regard to the anti – social behaviour in Bancroft Gardens it was agreed that pruning of trees and shrubs and clearance of dead vegetation was much more preferable than severe cut back and/or removal and welcomed the proposal for CCTV in the gardens.

The Committee noted the current lack of progress in the issue of street trading permits by others who were not officers of either Hertfordshire County Council or NHDC and the linkage between tables and chairs on pavements and current licensed businesses.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the information provided by the Community Development Officer on activities since the last meeting of the Hitchin Committee held on 17 April 2007 be noted;
- (2) That the designation of the Policy Manager at North Herts District Council as the officer to attend meetings of the Hitchin Town Centre Steering Group be noted and welcomed;
- (3) That the proposal to remove a line of conifer trees in Bancroft Gardens be unacceptable and that pruning and removal of dead vegetative material should be the preferred option;
- (4) That the proposal to install security lighting and CCTV equipment in Bancroft Gardens be implemented as soon as possible.

### **REASON FOR DECISIONS:**

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

#### **14. ANNUAL GRANTS, DEVELOPMENT, DISCRETIONARY AND VISIONING BUDGET 2007-2008**

The Committee considered the current expenditure and balance of the Annual Grants, Development, Discretionary and Visioning budget for 2007 – 2008.

The CDO advised the Committee that there remained a considerable amount of unspent pre-allocated grants from previous years. Should the Committee wish to increase grant funding (e.g. Hitchin Town Centre Initiative) it was suggested by the CDO and the Chairman that Members should review very carefully unspent allocations in their Ward Budgets for release into the 2007-2008 Discretionary Budget and advise the CDO accordingly.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the expenditure, allocations, and balance of the current 2007-2008 Development Budget, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be noted;
- (2) That Members be requested to review all current pre-allocated grant monies with a view to a release of some schemes from their ward list and advise the Community Development Officer of such releases in order to maximise the amount of grant that could be re- allocated to the Hitchin Town Centre Initiative.

**REASON FOR DECISIONS:**

To advise the Hitchin Committee of funds remaining for disbursement in the year 2007-2008 and prepare for a possible re-allocation of grants.

**15. GRANT APPLICATION – HITCHIN BOWLS CLUB**

**RESOLVED:** That subject to the availability of funds a grant of £1000 be awarded from the 2007-2008 Hitchin Discretionary Budget as a contribution towards costs associated with improvements and future use of the upper bowls green at Bancroft Gardens by the general public, schools and young peoples group, and that Hitchin Bowls Club be requested to approach Hitchin Youth Trust for a grant as the proposed activity was very much for young people.

**16. GRANT APPLICATION – HITCHIN TOWN CENTRE INITIATIVE**

**RESOLVED:** That a grant of £5,000 be awarded from the 2007-2008 Hitchin Central Area Budget as a contribution towards the costs of hanging baskets in the summer and Christmas lights in the winter in Hitchin Town Centre, and that additional grant be made available subject to the outcome at Minute 14 (2) above.

**17. GRANT APPLICATION – 3<sup>RD</sup> HITCHIN SCOUT GROUP**

**RESOLVED:** That subject to the availability of funds a grant of £710 from the 2007-2008 Hitchin Discretionary Budget be awarded as a contribution towards the costs of replacement tentage and camping equipment used by the Scout Group with the proviso that the applicant makes every effort to find alternative sources of funding e.g. Hitchin Youth Trust, Rotary and Round Table.

**18. GRANT APPLICATION – KOOL KIDS HOLIDAY CLUB**

**RESOLVED:** That on this occasion no grant should be awarded to the Kool Kids Holiday Club as the application did not meet the criteria set by this authority for grant applications.

**19. HITCHIN TOWN CENTRE MANAGER**

The Hitchin Town Centre Manager (HTCM) provided a comprehensive update on activities in Hitchin and welcomed the appointment of the NHDC Policy Manager to the Hitchin Town Centre Steering Group. He expressed disappointment that the HTCI had not reached the final short list of three to tender for Hitchin Town Hall and that perhaps all interested parties should have been invited to provide additional information so that the best use could be made of this valuable community asset.

The HTCM provided confirmation on a forthcoming seminar run by the NHDC Emergency Planning Manager on 27 June which would address terrorism attack, general security and emergency procedures in case of a major incident in North Herts. There had been a very good health awareness day with a large attendance and finally appreciation of the assistance provided by the NHDC Facilities Department in the installation of the fountain in the River Hiz at St Mary's Church.

**RESOLVED:** That the information provided be noted.

The meeting closed at 10.07 p.m.

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Chairman