

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

HITCHIN COMMITTEE

Meeting held at The Benslow Music Centre, Benslow Lane, Hitchin,
on 15 January 2008 at 7.30p.m.

MINUTES

PRESENT: *Councillors: Judi Billing (Chairman) Deepak Sangha (Vice - Chairman), Mrs A.G. Ashley, David Billing, Clare Body, Paul Clark, Joan Kirby, Bernard Lovewell, Lawrence Oliver and Martin Stears.*

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

78. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting, thanked everyone who attended the Hitchin Town Talk and welcomed those making a presentation to the Committee.

79. APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: Alan Millard, Ray Shakespeare-Smith and R.A.C.Thake.

80. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman advised the Committee that following information provided by Hertfordshire Constabulary at the Town Talk concerning Windmill Hill and the consumption of alcohol she would include an additional item for discussion following Agenda Item 7.

Reason for Urgency: The next meeting of the Hitchin Committee will be held on 18 March 2008 and the police sought the support of the Committee for an alcohol free zone on Windmill Hill as soon as possible in order to proceed with the necessary administration.

81. MINUTES – 20 NOVEMBER 2007

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2007 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman save for the following amendments:

Minute 75 (4) Service and Financial Planning 2008 – 2013

The last line to read: CG10 – Refurbishment of Hitchin Market.

Minute 77 (2) Annual Grants, Development, Discretionary and Visioning Budget 2007-2008 to read as follows:

- (2) That following advice provided by the Head of Financial Services it be agreed that the balance of funds in the Capital Visioning Budget 2007-2008 be transferred to the Discretionary Development Budget for 2007-2008.

82. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Agenda Item 6 – The Future of Bancroft Hall, Hitchin.

Councillors Paul Clark and Bernard Lovewell declared a prejudicial interest in that they were Director and Director/Treasurer of the Caldicott Centre Group respectively and confirmed that they would withdraw from the room for the duration of this item.

83. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – CALDICOTT CENTRE GROUP

The representatives of the Caldicott Centre Group thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee.

Following the closure of the Caldicott Centre in Highbury the Caldicott Centre Group (CCG) Directors had spent the last five years searching for a suitable venue to meet

the needs of children and young people in Hitchin. Bancroft Park would be an ideal location to construct a new multi – use community building, built to ensure energy efficiency and to the highest environmental standards. The building would provide for a extensive range of local needs using halls, reception area, meeting rooms, a quiet area and a community café. All current users of Bancroft Park had been consulted on the proposals and Hitchin Initiative had expressed support for this project and the EEDA grant for feasibility work supports partnership working with local businesses.

Should a new building be provided the outcome would include a new larger community building and would be financially sustainable enterprise that would allow hire of the facilities. The works would enhance Bancroft Park in appearance and greater use by the local community. Security of the new building would be vastly improved and vandalism would be reduced. The provision of a café in the new building had the support of all consultees and the outdoor play area for young people would be improved.

The Chairman thanked the speakers for the presentation and discussion was given over to the merits of the proposals with the added concern of the lack of public conveniences in or adjacent to Bancroft Park. Members of the Committee considered that the provision of a Café in the Park was an excellent proposal and that the Caldicott Centre Group should be encouraged to work closely with the Café in the Park Group to ensure that such a facility should be included in the final construction of a community hall in Bancroft Park.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the representatives of the Caldicott Centre Group be thanked for their very informative presentation;
- (2) That the Caldicott Centre Group and the Café in the Park Group be encouraged to take every opportunity for a joint approach to the future of Bancroft Hall.

REASON FOR DECISIONS

To ensure the continued support of the Hitchin Committee for local voluntary organisations.

84. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – CAFÉ IN THE PARK GROUP

The representatives of the 'Café in the Park Group' (The Group) thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and advised that they were local residents with young families and were regular users of Bancroft Park. The Group considered that the current Bancroft Hall had come to the end of its life and that they supported both Options as stated in the Minutes of Cabinet held on 18 December 2007 (Minute 84 refers) and that the potential use by The Caldicott Centre Group, current hall users and a café in a new building would not only benefit each group but would enhance Bancroft Park but would attract visitors to Hitchin.

The Group proposed that they could contribute a percentage of the construction costs in return for a shared ownership or a rent free lease. The Group would be present during the daytime and would provide daily management of the building, administer hall hire, maintain and clean the building and suggested that daily attendance would discourage vandalism and anti – social behaviour.

The Group would design and construct a green building using ecologically sound building techniques, materials, solar power, underfloor heating and water harvesting. The Group provided examples of other 'cafes in the park' at Peckham Rye Common, London and Helston, Cornwall.

In response to an enquiry The Group confirmed that they had a business plan and a business case to attract capital investment, that the proposed hours of business were 0800 to 20.00 and there would be no licensing applications.

The Chairman thanked the Café in the Park Group for their informative and innovative proposals and the Committee agreed that it would be essential for all parties to work in partnership to provide a new Community Centre for the residents of Hitchin.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the representatives of the Café in the Park Group be thanked for the informative presentation;
- (2) That the Café in the Park Group and the Caldicott Centre Group be encouraged to take every opportunity for a joint approach to the future of Bancroft Hall.

REASON FOR DECISIONS

To ensure the continued support of the Hitchin Committee for local voluntary organisations.

85. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – RHYTHMS OF THE WORLD 2008

The representative of the ROTW 2008 Committee thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and provide an update on the selection of a location of the 2008 ROTW Festival which would take place on the weekend of 12 and 13 July 2008.

Mr Knight confirmed that the 2008 ROTW Festival would not be held in Hitchin Town Centre. Negotiations were close to finalisation with landowners of two sites but an announcement could not be made as to the location at this meeting. Mr Knight also advised that in addition to agreeing on a site the matter of funding had to be confirmed as events of this type cost a lot of money to stage and it might be necessary to charge an entry fee. Mr Knight also confirmed that Hertfordshire Constabulary had been consulted on the two potential sites and had expressed no objection.

The Chairman thanked Mr Knight for the information provided and requested that the confirmation of a site for the 2008 ROTW Festival be made as soon as possible.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the representative of the Rhythms of the World 2008 Committee be thanked for the information;
- (2) That the representative of the Rhythms of the World 2008 Committee be requested to advise the Chairman of the Hitchin Committee of the location for the 2008 ROTW event as soon as it was known.

REASON FOR DECISIONS

To allow the Hitchin Committee continue with its support for the annual ROTW Festival.

86. THE FUTURE OF BANCROFT HALL

The Head of Community Development and Cultural Services (HCD) referred the Committee to the report presented to Cabinet on 18 December 2008 and the extract from the draft Minutes to the same meeting (Minute 84 refers) which identified five options for consideration by the Hitchin Committee and the Options 2 and 3 which were resolved by Cabinet as the best way forward. The HCD advised the Committee that the NHDC Asset Management Group had at its meeting on 20 June 2007 agreed that there was no other departmental need for Bancroft Hall and would therefore be regarded as surplus to requirements. The HCD suggested that the closed Bancroft Toilets could be demolished and perhaps build a 'café in the park' on the site.

The Committee agreed unanimously that Option 3 'Private Development Opportunity for the Site' should not be pursued. The Committee in light of the two presentations (Minutes 83 and 84 above refer) and by reference to Paragraphs 4.5 to 4.9 to the report also agreed that Option 2 'Children and Young Peoples Centre with Community Use, including a Café in the Park' was the most appropriate way forward for Bancroft Hall and indirectly Bancroft Park.

The Committee again discussed the current lack of public conveniences in Bancroft Park and agreed that the proposals for a new Bancroft Hall should have a design element that included public conveniences.

The Chairman proposed and it was agreed that regular updating reports on the re-juvenation of Bancroft Hall and Park should be made to future meetings of the Hitchin Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the contents of the Cabinet Draft Minute 84 dated 18 December 2007 be noted;
- (2) That the contents of the report of the Head of Community Development and Cultural Services presented to Cabinet at its meeting held on 18 December 2007 be noted;
- (3) That Options 2 and 3 as resolved by Cabinet for further consultation at its meeting held on 18 December 2007 be noted;
- (4) That the decision by Cabinet at its meeting held on 18 December 2007 to cease any further action on Options 1,4 and 5 be agreed;
- (5) That Option 3 – Private Development Opportunity for the site should not be pursued;
- (6) That Option 2 – Children and Young People's Centre with Community Use, including a Café in the Park for the site had the unanimous support of the Hitchin Committee;
- (7) That the Head of Community Development and Cultural Services be requested to ensure that an update on the development of plans for Bancroft Hall are made to the Hitchin Committee at its next meeting to be held on 18 March 2008 and all subsequent meetings.

REASON FOR DECISIONS

To allow the Hitchin Committee continue with its support for the local community.

87. HITCHIN TOWN CENTRE MANAGER

The Hitchin Town Centre Manager (TCM) thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee.

The TCM was pleased to advise the Committee that the cost of the 2007 Christmas Lights and Hanging Baskets had been covered by fundraising and a small surplus had been achieved.

The Committee noted that the Town Centre Initiative were concerned about the falling shop occupancy rate and the TCM advised that footfall was down by 4.7 per cent in the post Christmas period which had an effect on the secondary shopping areas. An announcement about the second stage of development of Hitchin Town Hall was expected in the next week and if successful the awards committee would visit Hitchin to view the town and Town Hall.

The TCM confirmed that the Town Centre Initiative with Hitchin Market Traders would submit a tender to NHDC by 31 January 2008. The TCM reported an increase in the amount of chewing gum left on pavements – especially outside public houses, and cracked paving stones remained a problem in the town centre.

The TCM was disappointed that no officer from NHDC attended the recent business ratepayers meeting and concluded his presentation with the dates of the 2008 Hitchin Festival which starts on 28 June and closes on 20 July.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the information provided by the Hitchin Town Centre Manager be noted;
- (2) That the Hitchin Town Centre Manager be congratulated on the coordination of the successful raising of funds to cover the costs in 2007 for Christmas Lights and Hanging Baskets in Hitchin.

88. ALOCOHOL FREE ZONE – WINDMILL HILL

The Chairman advised those present for the Committee meeting and had not been able to attend Hitchin Town Talk that Inspector Julie Wheatley had presented the latest statistics concerning crime in Hitchin and in particular incidents on Windmill Hill. Inspector Wheatley had confirmed that the view of Hertfordshire Constabulary had moved towards the introduction of an 'alcohol free zone' on Windmill Hill as a means of controlling under age consumption of alcohol, littering, theft and anti – social behaviour. The Committee also noted that young people from towns and villages outside Hitchin were also responsible for such behaviour on Windmill Hill as alcohol free zones elsewhere had moved young people into Hitchin.

The Committee accepted and supported the need for an 'alcohol free zone' but were very much aware of the displacement that would probably occur to other parts of Hitchin. With this in mind the Committee requested a report to the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee and that the Head of Policy, Partnerships and Performance be requested to contact Inspector Wheatley and discuss all administrative matters which would accelerate the introduction of an 'alcohol free zone' on Windmill Hill.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Hitchin Committee strongly supported the proposal by Hertfordshire Constabulary to implement an alcohol free zone on Windmill Hill, Hitchin.
- (2) That the Head of Policy, Partnerships and Performance be requested to present a detailed report to the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held on 18 March 2008 which would include all procedures and legal requirements for the introduction of an alcohol free zone at Windmill Hill, Hitchin;
- (3) That the Head of Policy, Partnerships and Performance be requested to include in the report an assessment of the likelihood of displacement and the effects of such displacement of persons to other areas of Hitchin should an alcohol free zone be introduced at Windmill Hill;
- (4) That the Head of Policy, Partnerships and Performance be requested to liaise closely and frequently with Inspector Julie Wheatley of Hitchin Police on all matters concerning the introduction of an alcohol free zone at Windmill Hill.

Note: The term ' alcohol free zone' should be referred to as a 'Designated Public Place Order' (In which the police have powers to stop and confiscate alcohol from persons they consider to be under the influence of alcohol and/or in possession of an open vessel).

REASON FOR DECISIONS

To confirm the support of the Hitchin Committee for the introduction of an alcohol free zone at Windmill Hill, Hitchin.

89. CHAMPION NEWS

The Community Development Officer (CDO) presented her report to the meeting and provided details of her community activities including *inter alia*: Vaisakhi, Hitchin bowls club, ROTW, Hitchin Allotments, Hitchin Town Hall, Caldicott Centre Clubs, Churchgate, Triangle CPZ, Community Project in Radcliffe Road/Dacre Road, Groundwork project on Windmill Hill, and Town Talk items follow up from 20 November 2007.

The Chairman invited the Head of Financial Services (HFS) -who was in the audience- to clarify the comments in Champion News (Paragraph 3.9) concerning the delays in short listing tenderers for the Development of Churchgate and Surrounding Area. The HFS advised that delays were due to the need for counsel opinion as to whether this development should have been advertised in the Official Journal of the European Union. Following comparison to the 'Roanne' case officers had concluded that it would be appropriate to place a notice in the OJEU in February 2008, unfortunately, this would mean a further delay and bids expected by the end of March 2008. The HFS confirmed that the revised date for the selection of the preferred developer would be in August 2008. In response to an enquiry about disclosure of the current companies who had expressed an interest to be short listed the HFS advised that business confidentiality had to be respected at all stages of the tendering process. The HFS also advised that it would be difficult to attract development companies if confidentiality could not be maintained.

The Committee were pleased to note progress concerning Environmental Issues in Cadwell Lane and other roads in Hitchin as presented at Appendix A. However, it was agreed that at Item S5 the word 'ongoing' in the Estimate Timescale column should be changed to reflect a more pro-active stance on monitoring of regulatory matters.

The Bearton Ward Members expressed concern at the delays which still persisted with the introduction of a Controlled Parking Zone in the Triangle Area of Hitchin and that a final scheme had yet to be identified. The Chairman proposed and it was agreed that a report should be presented to the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held on 18 March 2008.

The Committee were pleased to commend the work of the CDO and noted the many activities and progress of voluntary groups in Hitchin since the last meeting.

RESOLVED: That the information provided by the Community Development Officer on activities since the last meeting of the Hitchin Committee held on 20 November 2007 be noted.

- (1) That the information provided by the Community Development Officer on activities since the last meeting of the Hitchin Committee held on 20 November 2007 be noted.
- (2) That the Head of Planning and Building Control be requested to present a detailed report to the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held on 18 March 2008 concerning the implementation of a Controlled Parking Scheme in the Triangle Area of Hitchin including a precise timetable of works.

REASON FOR DECISIONS:

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

90. 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.

RESOLVED: That the expenditure, allocations, and balance of the current 2007-2008 Development Budget, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be noted;

REASON FOR DECISIONS:

To advise the Hitchin Committee of funds remaining for disbursement in the year 2007-2008 and allow the Hitchin Committee monitor progress concerning environmental issues in Cadwell Lane and St.Michael's Road, Hitchin.

91. GRANT APPLICATION – VAISAKHI 2008

RESOLVED: That a grant of £1000 be awarded in principle from the 2008-2009 Discretionary Budget as a contribution towards the costs of the procession that will take place on 19 April 2008.

92. GRANT APPLICATION – HITCHIN BEE CENTRE

RESOLVED: That a grant of £1500 be awarded in principle from the 2008-2009 Discretionary budget as a contribution to the sum of £2250 required to have access to a total grant of £25,000 that could be made by the Waste Recycling and Environmental Network towards the costs of the establishment of a Community Garden and Discovery Centre at Old Hale Way allotment site.

The meeting closed at 9.22 p.m.

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Chairman