

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

HITCHIN COMMITTEE

Meeting held at Westmill Community Centre, John Barker Place, Hitchin,
on 3 June 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, Alan Millard, Lawrence Oliver, R. Shakespeare - Smith, Martin Stears, and R.A.C. Thake*

IN ATTENDANCE: *John T. Campbell, Chief Executive, Amanda Phillips, Customer Service Manager, Keith Hoskins, Hitchin Town Centre Manager, Simon Young, Transport Policy Officer, Margaret Bracey, Community Development Officer, Hilary Dineen, Committee Administrator.*

4. APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absences were received.

5. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting, thanked everyone who attended the Hitchin Town Talk, welcomed those making a presentation to the Committee and Hilary Dineen who was acting as the Committee Administrator for this meeting.

The Chairman congratulated those members of the Hitchin Committee who had been re-elected in May 2008.

The Chairman announced that Minute 101 of the meeting held on 18 March 2008 would be amended to ensure clarification of the issues raised regarding Consultation on the Land Allocations Plan.

6. MINUTES – 18 MARCH 2008 and 15 MAY 2008

Minute 98

Members asked whether Minute 98 of the meeting held on 18 March 2008 "That the Hitchin Committee unanimously supported the request for a bus shelter in Redhill Road, Hitchin at a suitable location opposite the local shopping parade" had been actioned. The Transport Policy Officer advised that this will be followed up.

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2008 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendment:

Minute 101

That the following sentence be added at the end of paragraph 1;

"The representative from Hitchin Forum also advised the Committee that there had been many representations to the Forum concerning an inadequate time and opportunity for public consultation on the Land Allocations Plan."

That an additional resolution (6) should read as follows:

"It was agreed that there would be a further opportunity for discussion to take place on the Land Allocation Plan at the Town Talk on June 3rd."

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 15 May 2008 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

7. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman announced that three items of business would be taken as urgent or exceptional. These were as follows:

1. Grant request to enable the Hitchin Swimming Pool to open for longer periods. The Chairman accepted this item due to the urgency of the issue and the NHDC Committee Cycle. This was discussed under Minute 21 headed "Grant Application – Hitchin Open Air Swimming Pool".
2. An update from Members regarding the Hitchin Town Working Party. The Chairman accepted this item due to the urgency of the issue and the NHDC Committee Cycle.
3. Discussion regarding the closure of the Bancroft public conveniences. The Chairman accepted this item due to the urgency of the issue, the NHDC Committee Cycle and in the public interest.

8. BANCROFT PUBLIC CONVENIENCES

Reason for Urgency

The Chairman accepted this item due to the urgency of the issue, the NHDC Committee Cycle and in the public interest

The Chairman explained the background as follows: the public conveniences in Bancroft had been closed, as part of last year's review, leaving no alternative facility in the area of the Bancroft Park. The result of the closure had been that the Park and surrounding gardens had been used by people relieving themselves causing not only mess, but a health hazard and public nuisance. The Chairman of Hitchin Committee and the Police had requested the reopening of the Bancroft public conveniences. The Members had a full discussion including: that Bancroft was one of the major parks in Hitchin and is near the Town Centre; it was a long distance to the next available public conveniences; that even if enforcement action was able to deter anti-social behaviour by adults this was the main park that children play in and they need a facility. There was now a need for the Police and CDRP to be involved due to the unacceptable use of the Park and Gardens as an "open air" public convenience by certain individuals.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

1. That the Bancroft public conveniences be reopened on a temporary basis only, pending the development of a new Bancroft Hall;
2. That the costs of reopening and operating the Bancroft public conveniences be investigated and advised to the Hitchin Committee at its next meeting;
3. That the costs of the proposed remedial action and equipment proposed to deter unacceptable behaviour be also reported to the Hitchin Committee at its next meeting.

9. HITCHIN TOWN WORKING PARTY

Reason for Urgency

The Chairman accepted this item due to the urgency of the issue and the NHDC Committee Cycle.

The Chairman requested an update regarding the Hitchin Town Centre Working Party (HTCWP) that met on 20 May 2008. Councillor Deepak Sangha advised the Committee that at the meeting held on 20 May the tendering process had been discussed and the reasons for delay due to the Roanne Case (Auroux and others v Commune de Roanne (Case c – 220/05) January 2007). Advisers to the Council BTZ Consultants and Eversheds advised the HTCWP on the process that could be followed including procurement options available and the risks for each option. Following debate the HTCWP agreed a schedule of steps and the procurement option to be taken.

The Hitchin Committee discussed issues regarding the Hitchin Town Centre Working Party and expressed concern that insufficient notice had been given to Hitchin Members regarding the date of the meeting. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Hitchin Committee had not been notified of the meeting, nor the length of time that the tendering process had been held in abeyance. The Hitchin Committee then debated whether Hitchin Councillors should be advised of meeting dates, invited to meetings and receive all agenda papers.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Strategic Director of Finance and Regulatory Services be requested to ensure that all Hitchin Members are sent the agenda papers relating to each meeting of the Hitchin Town Centre Working Party;
2. That the Strategic Director of Finance and Regulatory Services be requested to ensure that the Hitchin Town Centre Manager be sent the agenda papers for each meeting of the Hitchin Town Centre Working Party;
3. That the Strategic Director of Finance and Regulatory Services be requested to ensure that the Chairman and Vice Chairman of Hitchin Committee be invited to all future meetings of the Hitchin Centre Town Working Party.

10. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The Chairman read out the following:

Members are reminded that any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda, should be declared as either prejudicial or personal interest and are required to notify the Chairman of the nature of any interest declared at the commencement of the item on the agenda. Members declaring a prejudicial interest should leave the room and not seek to influence the decision during that particular item.

11. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – Charlton Village Issues

Mr John Pearce thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee. He gave a presentation regarding the issues that face the village of Charlton. His presentation included the following points: Charlton is a very small village on the edge of Hitchin consisting of approximately 22 houses and 1 public house; the village was historic with an old windmill and a derelict water mill. Mr Pearce informed the Committee that the issues that affected Charlton included: the potential for development and that any future development was sympathetic to the area; the abundance of advertising signage in the village; that a small historic building had been destroyed and the protection of historic buildings in the future; traffic problems caused by speeding traffic in narrow streets. Mr Pearce summarised the problems in Charlton as being: no Parish Council; no active residents association; no interest in non social activities; no sustainable plan for the future and little or no control of the future of the village.

The Chairman thanked Mr Pearce for his presentation and Members gave advice regarding ways forward including: that Mr Pearce liaise with the Police regarding speeding traffic; that Mr Pearce be advised to contact Planning Aid; that the Community Development officer would liaise with Mr Pearce regarding suitable contacts and that the residents association be resurrected.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Mr Pearce be thanked for his informative presentation;
- (2) That the Community Development Officer be requested to liaise with Mr Pearce regarding suitable contacts.

12. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – Cadwell Lane and Hitchin Residents Alliance

The representative of Cadwell Lane and Hitchin Residents Alliance thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee. The representative informed the committee that her visit was a follow up from her presentation to the Committee one year ago and that many of the issues discussed at that time remained a problem including: dust contaminated steam drifting over local businesses causing them to have to invest in air filtration systems; that a pollution monitor was still awaited to determine what particles were in the air; ineffective road repairs; graffiti; speeding traffic; that the rail link was still not complete and there were no proper facilities to cross the road. She concluded by stating that residents wanted to see results and that if issues were dealt with the area could be an environmentally friendly and safe place to live and work.

Members held a lively discussion which included the following points: disappointment at the standard of the road repairs carried out; concern that there had not been a positive economic impact; disappointment that the action plan had been slow to take effect; concern at the lack of coordination between various agencies; concern at the

lack of communication with local residents.

RESOLVED:

(1) That the representative of Cadwell Lane and Hitchin Residents Alliance be thanked for her informative presentation;

(2) That the Hitchin Committee expressed their concern and disappointment at the lack of progress on the agreed action plan.

(3) That the members of the Cadwell Lane Task and Finish Group and appropriate officers meet with local residents to gain their views;

(4) That, as a preliminary investigation of the next step, the Head of Housing and Environmental Health be requested to convene, as soon as possible, a meeting with Hitchin Members (Cadwell Lane Task and Finish Group) in order to assess the latest progress on the action plan (as reiterated in Minute 18 below).

13. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – PETITION – Hollow Lane

The petitioners from Hollow Lane were unable to attend this meeting and gave their apologies.

14. HITCHIN COMMUNITY SURGERIES - UPDATE

The Customer Services Manager presented her report regarding updating the system to deal with issues arising from Hitchin Community Surgeries. She informed the Committee that this report was as a result of feedback from various sources including Town Talk. The proposal was a simple method to improve the existing process and ensure residents get answers and Members receive information. The proposed system included: that ward members would receive copies of relevant issues raised; all Hitchin Committee Members would receive a summary of all issues raised and that a summary form be introduced to ensure actions are followed through.

Members were happy with the proposed system and suggested some minor improvements including: the addition of an additional column on the summary form to record details of issues passed to a third party for instance regarding highways; that County Councillors should receive copies of correspondence and that reference numbers relating to questions and queries should be shortened.

The Customer Services Manager confirmed that these suggestions would be incorporated into the system.

RESOLVED: That the Hitchin Community Surgeries Update be noted.

15. WINDMILL HILL: – ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AND A DESIGNATED PUBLIC PLACE

The Chief Executive updated the Committee on the progress of the Windmill Hill – Anti Social Behaviour and a Designated Public Place. He advised that many positive steps had been taken including: discussions with CDRP; agreement to move forward with the Designated Public Place Order (DPPO), although it was noted that this will take some time; that the Government is producing information relating to a youth action plan, which highlights the importance of this. The Chief Executive explained that there could be an issue of displacement to the Bancroft area which needed to be discussed; it may be necessary to consider more than one DPPO to prevent displacement. He also advised that it was not yet clear where to set the boundaries of the DPPO and therefore thorough consultation was essential.

Members held a full discussion which included: that it was important not to brand all young people with the same brush and that it was essential to ensure that all possible problem areas be considered in the consultation.

RESOLVED:

(1) That the updating information provided in the report of the Chief Executive be noted;

- (2) That Inspector Julie Wheatley be asked to provide updates regarding the Windmill Hill Designated Public Place Order at future meetings or at Town Talk.

REASON FOR DECISIONS

To allow the Hitchin Committee continue with its support for the provision of a Designated Public Place Order at Windmill Hill.

16. HITCHIN URBAN TRANSPORT PLAN

The Transport Policy officer informed the Committee: that Hertfordshire Highways had brought the Hitchin Urban Transport Plan (HUTP) forward; that a consultant would be in place from July 2008 for a period of twelve to eighteen months and that a process had been agreed to ensure the plan is moved forward.

Members held a full discussion regarding the HUTP which included: that Councillors Ashley, Body and Kirby be appointed as representatives of the Hitchin Committee; that Hitchin Town Talk was a structure which could be used as a stakeholder event; that previous presentations and photos from interested parties was to be included as data collection; that written material regarding the Hitchin Urban Transport Plan should be made available to the Hitchin Committee (via the Chairman) to enable future discussion and input.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Councillors Ashley, Body and Kirby be appointed as representatives of the Hitchin Committee to the Hitchin Urban Transport Plan;
- (2) That Hitchin Town Talk be used as a stakeholder event;
- (3) That the Transport Policy Officer be asked to collate presentations and photos from interested parties to add to the Hitchin Urban Transport data collection;
- (4) That written material regarding the Hitchin Urban Transport Plan be made available to the Hitchin Committee (via the Chairman) to enable future discussion and input.

REASON FOR DECISION

To ensure that the Hitchin Committee receive all relevant information and are able to contribute effectively to the Hitchin Urban Transport Plan.

17. HITCHIN TOWN CENTRE MANAGER

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

The TCM advised that a company had been registered in the name of Hitchin Markets Limited; that the initial handover took place on 1 July 2008; that there was some concern regarding the number of empty units in the Town; there would be presentations in the town regarding BID and that 70 businesses had stated that they would support a launch day.

RESOLVED: That the information provided by the Hitchin Town Centre Manager be noted.

18. CHAMPION NEWS

The Community Development Officer (CDO) provided a comprehensive update on her activities since the meeting of the Hitchin Committee held on 18 March 2008 and updated the Committee on the following: The School Surgery was held on 19 May 2008 with thanks to the Councillors who attended; A positive meeting was held on 22 May 2008 regarding the Brampton Park/Balmoral Road possible Residents Association or Neighbourhood watch, with a further meeting on 4 June 2008; A grant application will be forthcoming at a future Committee Meeting from Soundbase; a meeting was held regarding Windmill Hill on 19 May 2008 which confirmed that accessibility, improvement to the Dell and Policing were high on the agenda.

The CDO advised the Committee that additional schemes for traffic management in Hitchin had been put forward as detailed at Paragraph 3.16 to the report. The Committee were unanimous in their support for these new schemes to be referred to the NHHP – JMP to the next meeting to be held on 23 June 2008.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the actions taken by the Community Development Officer since the meeting of the Hitchin Committee held on 18 March 2008 be noted and supported;
- (2) That, as a preliminary investigation of the next step, the Head of Housing and Environmental Health be requested to convene, as soon as possible, a meeting with Hitchin Members (Cadwell Lane Task and Finish Group) in order to assess the latest progress on the action plan (as mentioned in minute 12 above).

RECOMMENDED TO NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE HIGHWAYS PARTNERSHIP - JOINT MEMBER PANEL:

That the Committee endorse the list below to be added to the list previously given to the North Hertfordshire Highways Partnership - Joint Member Panel.

- (i) Pedestrian phase at Cadwell Lane Traffic lights;
- (ii) Woolgrove Road vehicle activated 'slow down' sign near St Faiths Close where a number of frail people live;
- (iii) Pedestrian crossing in Purwell Lane at Mill Lane, where children cross who use Mill Lane as a short cut from Mary Exton School;
- (iv) Old Hale Way, pedestrian crossing near Our Lady's School.

REASON FOR DECISION

To ensure that the Hitchin Committee are advised of the activities of the CDO and note the activities of voluntary groups.

19. ANNUAL GRANTS, DEVELOPMENT, DISCRETIONARY AND VISIONING BUDGET 2008-2009

The Committee considered the current expenditure and balance of the Annual Grants, Development, Discretionary and Visioning budget for 2008 – 2009.

RESOLVED: That the expenditure, allocations, and balance of the current 2008-2009 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 2008-2009 and allow the Hitchin Committee to make appropriate grant awards.

20. GRANT APPLICATION – SRI-LANKAN SOCIAL & CULTURAL ASSOCIATION

RESOLVED: That a grant of £996 be awarded from the 2008-2009 Discretionary Budget as a contribution towards the costs of the support a veterans day event that will take place on 6 and 7 July 2008.

21. GRANT APPLICATION – HITCHIN OPEN AIR SWIMMING POOL

Reason for Urgency

The Chairman accepted this item due to the urgency of the issue and the NHDC Committee Cycle.

The CDO advised the Committee that it was not possible to open the Hitchin Open Air Swimming Pool for extra hours in this Civic Year due to staffing issues. The Committee requested that the CDO investigate how much was likely to be required to allow increased opening times in the next Civic Year.

RESOLVED: That the Community Development Officer be requested to investigate the possible hourly costs involved in extra opening hours for the Hitchin Open Air Swimming Pool for the current season and the likely costs for the 2009 season.

The meeting closed at 9.50 p.m.

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Chairman