

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

HITCHIN COMMITTEE

Meeting held at The Gurdwara, Wilbury Way, Hitchin,
on 22 July 2008 at 7.30p.m.

MINUTES

PRESENT: *Councillors: Judi Billing (Chairman) Deepak Sangha (Vice-Chairman), Mrs A.G. Ashley, David Billing, Paul Clark, Bernard Lovewell, Alan Millard, Lawrence Oliver, R. Shakespeare -Smith, Martin Stears, and R.A.C. Thake.*

Note: Councillor Paul Clark left the meeting at 8.50 p.m.

ALSO PRESENT: *Councillor Mrs L. Needham (Portfolio Holder for Waste and Recycling).*

IN ATTENDANCE: *Patrick Candler, Head of Community Development and Cultural Services,
Keith Hoskins, Hitchin Town Centre Manager,
Margaret Bracey, Community Development Officer,
Nigel Schofield, Committee Administrator,
Part time: John Robinson, Strategic Director of Customer Services
Vaughan Watson, Head of Leisure and Environmental Services*

22. APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Mrs Joan Kirby and Councillor Clare Body.

23. 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. The Chairman advised that Hitchin Society and Mr L. Stockwell had sent their apologies.

24. MINUTES – 3 JUNE 2008

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 3 June 2008 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendment:

MINUTE 12 – PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – CADWELL LANE

To read as follows with the insertion of *former*:

(3) That the members of the *former* 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 (*former* Cadwell Lane Task and Finish Group) in order to assess the latest progress on the action plan (as reiterated in Minute 18 below).

MINUTE 18 – CHAMPION NEWS

To read as follows:

(3) That the members of the *former* 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 (*former* Cadwell Lane Task and Finish Group) in order to assess the latest progress on the action plan.

25. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman advised the Committee that as a matter of urgency she wished to discuss with the Committee's agreement the announcement from Post Office Ltd. that the sub post office at Blakes Corner, Ickleford Road, Hitchin was to be closed.

26. 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.

27. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – SUMMER EVENT IN THE DELL

Mr Wiseman and Mr Xenophontos thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee. The Committee received a detailed and informative presentation on the use of 'High Ropes' by 'Jump' as an outdoor activity that could benefit many groups of people through teamwork, inclusion, growth, ecological respect with a low carbon footprint social responsibility and how to act safely.

'Jump' were well aware of the need to meet Local Area Agreement targets and there were several types of high ropes courses: assisted belay, continuous belay, and a combination of the two. One of the major obstacles – apart from finance – was the availability of a suitable site with possible sites at: The Dell, Hitchin Swim Centre, Hitchin Boys School, Bancroft Gardens, Ransom Recreation Ground and Oughtonhead Common.

The Chairman thanked the presenters and the Committee expressed support for the proposal and wished them both a successful venture.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Messrs Wiseman and Xenophontos be thanked for the information concerning 'Jump' A High Ropes course for North Herts;
- (2) That the Community Development Officer be requested to enter into discussions with the representatives of 'Jump' to investigate potential sites and whether a grant application would be appropriate.

REASON FOR DECISION

To continue the support of the Hitchin Committee for Community events in Hitchin.

28. THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR WASTE AND RECYCLING

Councillor Mrs L. Needham thanked the Chairman for the invitation to address the Committee.

Councillor Needham provided a comprehensive description of the responsibilities of the Portfolio Holder for Waste and recycling at NHDC. Waste and recycling with 41 per cent of arisings recycled and a target of 44.5 per cent at April 2009 and 50 per cent by 2010 as part of the Herts Waste Strategy target. Future targets for 2039 were 100 per cent recycling with the expected figure of 99.2 per cent recycled achieved. NHDC were looking at ways to collect and recycle glass and cardboard from for example Public Houses which would be easier in urban areas than rural locations. On the domestic front there would eventually be waste and recyclable material collection from flats and multi occupied houses, unfortunately no block of flats were ever the same and consequently one collection system would not fit all properties.

Street cleansing was contracted out by NHDC with seven zones laid down by Act of Parliament with over 2000 litter bins emptied on a daily, once a week and as and when, but NHDC was not responsible for drain emptying and cleaning – this was Herts CC. A major problem in the urban areas was parked cars and Councillor Needham opined that enforcement action might be required if car owners did not move their vehicles following advance notice.

The Portfolio also covered burials, cemeteries, trees, green spaces, nature reserves, and public conveniences. Councillor Needham noted that the decision to close Bancroft public conveniences had not met with universal support and the quoted figure of £65,000 for a 12 month maintenance programme still seemed excessive. The contractor would be requested to provide a more detailed breakdown of the estimate. Councillor Needham advised the Committee that the operation of 12 public conveniences when operated by NHDC had always exceeded the budget by a wide margin, and costs as in all service delivery had to be controlled very carefully.

Following on from issues raised at the Town Talk Councillor Needham agreed to look at several street cleansing problems in Hitchin, take action on commercial waste wheelie bins on the footway in the town centre and seek a waste and recycling site in Hitchin. In response to an enquiry on recycling plastics Councillor Needham confirmed that there were 42 types of plastic that could be recycled but at the moment only plastic bottles were commercially viable and that there were only 2 or 3 sites in the UK that could take plastic trays. Town Talk had also brought forward the need for a recycling site in Hitchin with queues of 20 minutes at the Letchworth Black Horse Lane site run by Herts CC.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Needham for the very informative presentation and on behalf of the Committee expressed a wish that every effort should be made to deal with the issues raised at Town Talk.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Councillor Mrs Lynda Needham be thanked for the update on waste collection and recycling;
- (2) That Councillor Needham be thanked for the clarification of waste collection and recycling issues in Hitchin;
- (3) That Councillor Needham be requested with the assistance of the Head of Leisure and Environmental Services to pursue the matter of trade waste in commercial wheelie bins left on the footway in Hitchin Town Centre and if necessary take enforcement action through Section 46 of the Environmental Health Act;
- (4) That the Head of Leisure and Environmental Services be requested to liaise with Hertfordshire County Council on order to find a suitable site in Hitchin to receive recycling materials as soon as possible.

REASON FOR DECISIONS

To allow officers to undertake enforcement action in Hitchin Town Centre.

29. THE CLOSURE OF POST OFFICES IN NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE

The Chairman raised this issue as a matter of urgency due to the NHDC Committee Cycle and that the consultation period would be completed before the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee.

The Chairman advised the Committee that public consultation on closure proposals commenced on 8 July 2008 for a period of six weeks with a closing date of 26 August 2008 for reporting back to the post office consultation team. The Chairman confirmed that the Head of Policy, Partnerships and Performance had been very helpful in compiling information and assessing the closure proposals.

Notwithstanding the other proposed closures in North Herts it was the Committee's view that the proposed closure of Blakes Corner sub post office was unacceptable and that the recent closure of the sub post office in Cambridge Road, Hitchin had already affected many residents. The proposed alternative in Redhill Road was too far away for elderly people and others to walk to (there was an uphill part to the route) and this closure affected more than the loss of a post office as the shop would not be viable without income from Post Office Ltd. It was agreed that retail outlets with a post office were the hub of a local community whether it was a village or an urban residential area.

The Committee agreed that it was necessary for everyone to make a concerted effort to oppose the closures of post offices in Hitchin and North Hertfordshire and that all District Councillors should be encouraged to take the necessary action to state their opposition.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Hitchin Committee were unanimous in its opposition to the closure of Blakes Corner Sub Post Office;
- (2) The Hitchin Committee requested the support of the other four NHDC Area Committees and all should voice their objections as soon as possible to the proposed closure of all sub post offices in North Hertfordshire and that the full Council should also support this opposition.

30. SUNDAY PARKING IN MARKET PLACE, HITCHIN

The Chairman advised the Committee that it had become apparent that the parking of vehicles in the Market Place on a Sunday had reached such a density that the amenity of the Market Place for local residents and visitors had become eroded.

The Chairman confirmed that young children had been observed at play in the Market Place on a Sunday whilst vehicles were manoeuvring and asked the Committee if they wished to support a proposal that would extend the parking restrictions to include a Sunday. The Committee agreed with the Chairman's proposal and suggested that the 'pedestrianisation' of the High Street should be extended to include Sunday.

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning whilst supporting this proposal warned that parking controls and amended Traffic Regulation Orders took time, resources and costs which would require close attention. The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Environmental Health also supported the idea, but, stressed the need for car parking facilities for all users of Hitchin Town Centre in light of increased activity, with for example the car boot sale affecting the available car parking spaces for the congregation at St. Marys Church.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That it would be desirable to extend the parking restrictions in Market Place to include the central area for 'no parking' on a Sunday between the hours of 08.00 and 18.00;
- (2) That it would be desirable to extend no access for vehicles on a Sunday in High Street, Hitchin until 08.00 on a Monday.
- (3) That the Head of Planning and Building Control be requested to present a report to the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held on 23 September 2008 which would include:
 - a. An assessment of the time it would take to amend the Traffic Regulation Order applicable to Market Place;
 - b. An assessment of the time it would take to amend the Traffic Regulation Order applicable to the pedestrian zone in High Street, Hitchin to include all day Sunday;
 - c. What the order of costs would be to achieve such amendments;
 - d. The availability of resources within the Local Authority to undertake such a review;
 - e. A commentary on the control and enforcement of Traffic Regulation Orders in Hitchin Town Centre.

31. SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS – REVIEW OF 2006-2009 AND PROPOSALS FOR 2009-2012

The Head of Community Development and Cultural Services (HCD) presented his report to the Committee and confirmed that the allocation of Service Level Agreements (SLAs) was part of the NHDC Corporate Business Planning and should be compliant with the Strategic objectives of the Council.

In addition to the main, centrally funded SLAs, Area Committees now funded smaller SLAs with local organisations following a longer term service relationship which was appropriate and official.

The HCD referred the Committee to the table at Paragraph 4.2 which detailed the timetable for the new phase of SLAs, to Appendix 1 which outlined the framework for the re-negotiation of SLAs and to Appendix 2 which listed the three SLAs funded in Hitchin i.e. Apni Duniya Holiday Scheme, Hitchin Festival and Hitchin Senior Citizens Welfare Committee. The HCD advised the Committee that he would welcome recommendations for additional schemes and/or organisations that were currently funded by the Hitchin Committee from its annual discretionary budget and could be included in the SLA programme e.g. Rhythms of the World, Hitchin Town Centre Initiative for Christmas lights and Hanging Baskets.

The HCD confirmed that any proposals for new SLAs should preferably be passed through the Community Development Officer.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the review of the local Service Level Agreements for 2007-2008 as set out in Appendix 2 be noted;
- (2) That the proposal to rebalance the funding of a Service Level Agreement which would better reflect the district wide/local focus be noted;
- (3) That the Hitchin Committee be requested to advise the Head of Community Development and Leisure Services and/or the community Development Officer of proposals for any further tranches of Service Level Agreements to be funded in the period 2009-2010;
- (4) That the confirmation that detailed negotiations with individual projects would be conducted by officers in consultation with the appropriate Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement and Rural Affairs and Area Committee Chairman be noted;
- (5) That the proposed timescale for implementing the new Service Level Agreements as detailed at Paragraph 4.10 to the report be noted;
- (6) That the proposal to present a further report on Service Level Agreement outcomes at either the meeting to be held on 23 September 2008 or 18 November 2008 be noted.

REASON FOR DECISIONS

To confirm the future strategic policy direction for the programme of financial assistance for the voluntary and community sector, through the negotiation of Service Level Agreements.

32. HITCHIN TOWN CENTRE MANAGER

The Hitchin Town Centre Manager (HCM) thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and welcomed the comments on cleansing in Hitchin and the suggestions for extended parking regulations in Market Place.

The HCM was pleased to advise the Committee that the 2008 Hitchin Festival had been a great success with more than eighty events. ROTW had attracted over 23 thousand visitors on the two days. Hitchin Business Improvement District was improving all the time and requested action on the collection of trade waste and recycling materials. The TCM advised that Committee that it might be possible for a private enterprise to take over the operation of Bancroft Toilets and he would be making arrangements to collect keys for a site inspection. The TCM confirmed that Hammersmatch had submitted a planning application for the refurbishment of Churchgate which would include linkage to the Market.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the information provided be noted;
- (2) That the Hitchin Town Centre manager be congratulated on a successful Hitchin Festival in 2008;
- (3) That the proposal by Hitchin Town Centre Initiative to investigate the possibility of a private company operating Bancroft Public Conveniences be welcomed;
- (4) That the information concerning the application by Hammersmatch to refurbish the Churchgate Centre that would link with improvements to Hitchin Market be noted.

33. CHAMPION NEWS

The Community Development Officer (CDO) provided a comprehensive update on her activities since the meeting of the Hitchin Committee held on 3 June 2008 and updated the Committee on the following: Buzzworks Project – Thank you party was now 26 July; Ransoms Recreation Ground - Improvements to entrance gates; The Voice – new venue at Soundbase Studios; TASTE – information on Hitchin youth events; Westmill – Community Association and new Community Centre; CAYPOW – a celebration event on 16 August for the young people of Westmill; Picnic in the Park – hosted by NHH on 2 August at Purwell; Hitchin Museum – exhibition on sport in Hitchin; St. John's Community Centre – 20 years anniversary celebration on 2 August.

The CDO referred the Committee to the referral from the NHH – JMP at Paragraph 3.2 concerning joint matched funding for highway management schemes recommended previously by the Hitchin Committee and it was agreed to discuss this at the next agenda item.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the actions taken by the Community Development Officer since the meeting of the Hitchin Committee held on 3 June 2008 be noted and supported;
- (2) That the Community Development Officer be requested to liaise with Members over potential matched funding of schemes for traffic control and management as listed at Paragraph 3.2 to the report for referral to the Herts Highways - Joint Member Panel.

REASON FOR DECISION

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

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

Declarations of Interest – Grant Application Walsworth Festival 2009

Councillors Bernard Lovewell, Ray Shakespeare-Smith and Alan Millard declared a prejudicial interest as Walsworth Councillors and as members of the Walsworth Festival Committee and confirmed that they would leave the room for the duration of this item.

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

With regard to matched funding of highway management schemes there was doubt raised as to the specific amount of 50 per cent as resolved by the NHHP –JMP at its meeting on 23 June 2008 (Minute 18 (1) refers). The Committee agreed that further discussion was needed between individual Ward Members before any decision could be made as to the precise amount of matched funding and whether a 50 per cent figure could be agreed.

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;

35. GRANT APPLICATION – ATSK KARATE CLUB

RESOLVED: That a grant of £912 be awarded from the 2008-2009 Discretionary Budget as a contribution towards the costs of karate courses for a four week free period in six taster sessions per annum for young people from age 5+ including hall hire and promotional costs.

36. GRANT APPLICATION – WALSWORTH FESTIVAL 2008

RESOLVED: That a grant of £1,000 be awarded from the 2008-2009 Discretionary Budget as a contribution to the costs of the 2009 Walsworth Festival for insurance and items such as additional toilets required under new licensing regulations.

37. HITCHIN TOWN CENTRE INITIATIVE

RESOLVED: That a grant of £5,000 be awarded from the Central Area Grants allocation of the 2008 – 2009 Discretionary Budget as a contribution towards the costs of hanging baskets and Christmas Lights in 2008.

38. HITCHIN SWIM CENTRE

RESOLVED: That a grant of £590 be awarded from the Central Area Grants allocation of the 2008 – 2009 Discretionary Budget as a contribution towards the costs of extended swimming (from 18.30 to 20.00) hours at the open air pool on five Wednesdays from 30 July to 27 August 2008.

39. SOUNDBASE STUDIOS

RESOLVED: That a grant of £3000 be awarded from the Central Area Grants allocation of the 2008-2009 Discretionary Budget as a contribution towards the set up costs of the new Under 18 'dry pub' music venue in Churchgate.

40. RECOMMENDED TO NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE HIGHWAYS PARTNERSHIP - JOINT MEMBER PANEL:

That the following projects and schemes were reviewed by the Committee and it was agreed that more discussion was required between Hitchin Ward Members. The Head of Community Development and Cultural Services advised Members that that it could be appropriate to look at grant budgets pre allocated and carried forward to possibly match fund such schemes.

(1)	Grass verge protection by wooden bollards in Wymondley Road, Hitchin.	50 per cent = £750 Decision deferred	Wards: Highbury and Walsworth
(2)	Grass verge protection by verge hardening in Bury Mead Road (first section from Grove Road junction)	50 per cent = £2,000 Decision deferred	Ward: Bearton
(3)	Flashing School Sign in Wymondley Road (location to be confirmed)	50 per cent = £2000 Decision deferred	Wards: Highbury and Walsworth
(4)	Vehicle activated sign in Woolgrove Road.	50 per cent = £3000 Decision deferred	Wards; Bearton and Walsworth

- (5) 'Elderly persons crossing' warning sign in Bancroft. 50 per cent = £1250 Wards: Bearton and Highbury
Decision
deferred

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.

The meeting closed at 9.25 p.m.

.....
Chairman