

## NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

### HITCHIN COMMITTEE

Meeting held at The Roman Catholic Church Hall, Nightingale Road, Hitchin,  
on 23 September 2008 at 7.30p.m.

#### MINUTES

**PRESENT:** *Councillors: Deepak Sangha (Chairman),  
Mrs A.G. Ashley, David Billing, Paul Clark, Joan Kirby,  
Bernard Lovewell, Alan Millard, Lawrence Oliver,  
R. Shakespeare –Smith and R.A.C. Thake.*

*Note: Councillor R.A.C. Thake left the meeting at 9.42 p.m.*

**IN ATTENDANCE:** *John Robinson, Strategic Director of Customer Services  
David Scholes, Head of Planning and Building Control  
Keith Hoskins, Hitchin Town Centre Manager  
Margaret Bracey, Community Development Officer  
Nigel Schofield, Committee Administrator*

**41. APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received from Councillors: Judi Billing, Clare Body and Martin Stears.

**42. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Councillor Deepak Sangha advised the Committee that the Chairman, Councillor Judi Billing had given her apologies and that he would be Chairman for this meeting. The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting, thanked everyone who attended the Hitchin Town Talk and welcomed those presenting a petition to the Committee.

**43. MINUTES – 22 JULY 2008**

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 July 2008 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman. The Chairman reminded the Committee with reference to Minute 40 that a decision needed to be made at this meeting if possible about matched funding for highway projects identified in the JMP Discretionary Budget for 2008-2009. It was agreed to discuss this issue at Agenda Item 11.

**44. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS – CHURCHGATE DEVELOPMENT**

The Chairman accepted a request from Councillor David Billing to discuss progress with Churchgate. After a short debate it was considered appropriate to request a report from the Strategic Director of Finance and Regulatory Services for the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held on 18 November 2008 which would detail the criteria used in the selection of the short-listed bidders, current progress in the competitive dialogue process and the revised Marketing Plan following the meeting of the Hitchin Town Centre Working party held on 9 September 2008.

**45. 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.

**46. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – PRESENTATION OF A PETITION – REQUEST FOR EXERCISE EQUIPMENT**

The lead petitioner thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to present a petition with approximately 90 signatures with a request for the Committee to support the provision of exercise equipment at St. John's Recreation Ground in Hitchin. The equipment was

intended to be used in the main by senior citizens and/or individuals recovering from illness and for rehabilitation e.g. heart attacks and strokes.

By way of background information the lead petitioner referred to a previous media announcement and that a presentation of this equipment had been made to the Baldock Committee on 21 July 2008. The Committee noted the benefits of this equipment and expressed support for the proposal by the petitioners. The Community Development Officer was able to advise the Committee that costs for 4 to 5 pieces was in the order of £8,200 and 7 pieces in the order of £12,500. These costs were considered to be currently outside the balances of the 2008-2009 Discretionary Budget and the CDO was requested to contact the Parks and Countryside Development Manager to enquire about the feasibility of installing such equipment at recreation grounds in North Hertfordshire and what other sources of partnership funding (e.g. Grass Roots) could be found to support such equipment purchase.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the lead petitioner be thanked for the petition;
- (2) That the Committee expressed its support for the proposal to install exercise equipment at St. John's Recreation Ground;
- (3) That the Community Development Officer be requested to enter into discussions with the Parks and Countryside Development Manager and report back to the Committee via a future edition of Champion News with advice on the feasibility of such equipment at St. John's Recreation Ground and elsewhere in North Hertfordshire and potential sources of funding for such equipment e.g. Grass Roots and partnership resources.

**REASON FOR DECISION**

To confirm the support of the Hitchin Committee for the well being of the local community.

**47. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – PRESENTATION OF A PETITION – TRAFFIC ISSUES IN PARK STREET, HITCHIN**

Councillor Paul Clark thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to present this petition to the Committee on behalf of residents in Park Street, Hitchin. Even though there were few dwellings in Park Street there had been an almost unanimous response from residents in signing the petition. Councillor Clark reminded the Committee that there had been many traffic accidents and recently a serious encroachment into a residents front garden, with fortunately no fatalities. Residents were extremely concerned about the speed of all types of vehicles using Park Street and were anxious to see some form of traffic management that would restrict the speed of traffic and make the footway in Park Street much safer for everyone and improve the quality of life for residents.

Councillor Clark sought support from the Committee to take the concerns of Park Street forward and urged that action be taken as a matter of urgency to curb the speed of all vehicles. Councillor Clark was pleased to note that the kerb stones at the edge of the footways on Park Street would be raised soon.

With assistance from County Councillor D. Ashley and Councillor R. A.C. Thake there ensued a short debate concerning the form of referral to the North Hertfordshire Highways Partnership – Joint Member Panel and it was considered that a direct approach to the Joint Member Panel for support concerning these road safety issues would be appropriate and that consideration should be given to Category 2 funding.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That Councillor Paul Clark be thanked for presenting the petition;
- (2) That the concern of residents in Park Street about speeding vehicles be noted;
- (3) That this problem in Park Street should be regarded as a road safety issue;

- (4) That the North Hertfordshire Highways – Joint Member Panel at its next meeting to be held on 13 October 2008 be invited to approve and support the need to deal with the road safety issues in Park Street as a matter of urgency.

**RECOMMENDED TO THE NORTH HERTS HIGHWAYS PARTNERSHIP – JOINT MEMBER PANEL**

- (1) That the Joint Member Panel be requested to note the concerns of the residents in Park Street, Hitchin about speeding vehicles and damage to residential dwellings;
- (2) That the Joint Member Panel be requested to support the views expressed by the Hitchin Committee and forward to the appropriate department at Hertfordshire County Council the need for the road safety issues in Park Street to be addressed as soon as possible and if appropriate under Category 2 funding.

**REASON FOR DECISION**

To allow the concerns of local residents be brought forward to the North Hertfordshire Highways – Joint Member Panel.

**48. BANCROFT PARK – ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR**

The Strategic Director of Customer Services (SD) thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to present this report to the Committee and provided a comprehensive update on investigations at Bancroft Gardens and anti social behaviour (ASB). The SD also referred the Committee to Appendix A – Briefing Note - to the report which gave details in particular of observations made by NHDC officers and police at Bancroft Gardens in July and August 2008 and the outcomes of a meeting at Bancroft Gardens with Hitchin Committee Members on 12 August 2008. This report was in response to the concern of Members about anti social behaviour in the area bounded by Bancroft Park, Windmill Hill and Hitchin Market where there had been a significant number incidents of anti social behaviour. The SD confirmed to the Committee that ASB in Hitchin was noted in areas away from Bancroft Gardens and that by referral to Paragraph 13 at Appendix A the Committee noted that in the period 4 July 2008 to 13 August 2008 there had been no ASB recorded in Bancroft Gardens.

However there had been many records of litter, rough sleepers, broken glass, drinking of alcohol in Bancroft Gardens and one particular problem was the irregularity of locking the park gate and officers would address this issue. The erection of a strong fence between Sainsburys car park and the bowling club had prevented intrusion onto the bowling green.

The SD was aware that the particular concern raised by Hitchin Members at the meeting held on 12 August had been the ongoing lack of toilet provision in Bancroft Gardens. The possibility of the Hitchin Town Centre Initiative operating the Bancroft Toilets could not be supported as financial assistance was required from NHDC and this could not be agreed due to the existing Council policy in respect of public toilets. The SD confirmed that an additional pan, tilt and zoom camera would not be installed in the Gardens but would be installed at the junction of Whinbush Road, Nightingale Road, Bancroft Junction as the number of incidents of people leaving clubs and fast food outlets was higher than the Gardens.

The Committee noted that a possible application for Green Flag Status to Bancroft Gardens would require close attention to the needs of park users and the provision of or access to public toilets with the knowledge that toilets did not necessarily have to be provided in the park itself. The Committee discussed the benefits of achieving Green Flag status and considered that every effort should be made for Bancroft Gardens to achieve such status and that presentation of an Action Plan to a future meeting of the Hitchin Committee would be most useful.

The Chairman thanked the SD for the presentation and thanked officers for the observations recorded at Bancroft Gardens. Despite the lack of specific records of anti social behaviour it was the public belief that behaviour of certain individuals in the Gardens was unacceptable (e.g. urination and excessive drinking of alcohol) although this unfortunately could not be reconciled within the parameters for ASB. The Committee was pleased to note that the residents of North Herts Sanctuary would be allowed to use this hostel during the day for toilet facilities. The provision of a toilet facility in Bancroft Gardens was important for families using the gardens and the closure of the Bancroft Toilets could deter some visitors. In response to an enquiry on the provision of toilet facilities in Bancroft Gardens as referenced at Paragraph 4.5 to the report the SD confirmed that the facility in question was used by a contractor and the toilet would have to be replaced, hence the high costs quoted.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the contents of the report on anti-social behaviour in Bancroft Park, Hitchin be noted;
- (2) That the contents of the briefing note as presented at Appendix A to the report be noted;
- (3) That the proposal to achieve Green Flag Status for Bancroft Gardens had the unanimous support of the Committee.
- (4) That the Strategic Director of Customer Services and Parks and Parks and Countryside Development Manager be requested to present a report to a future meeting of the Hitchin Committee which would provide more details about Green Flag Status for Bancroft Gardens and an Action Plan setting out a timetable to achieve Green Flag Status;
- (5) That the Parks and Countryside Development Manager be requested to take the appropriate action to ensure that the gate to Bancroft Gardens is locked by users of the Gardens both on entry and exit in order to prohibit the unauthorised use of this public amenity especially at night time.

**REASON FOR DECISIONS**

To allow the Hitchin Committee contribute to the continued development of the social amenity of Bancroft Gardens.

**49. TRANSPORT AND PLANNING ISSUES IN NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE AND HITCHIN**

The Chairman invited the NHDC Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning to make a presentation to the Committee concerning the wide range of services for which he had responsibility. The Portfolio Holder provided an informative description and commented that there had and continued to be an impressive output by officers. The Portfolio Holder described the activities which included *inter alia*: Planning Control and Conservation; Building Control; Regional and Strategic Planning; The Local Development Framework and Projects and Transport and provided some impressive statistics e.g. In 2007, 1678 applications were processed; 212 enforcement cases were managed; 10 Section 106 and 31 Unilateral undertakings; there were 4490 construction projects; the value of works was just under £M 279; 7352 inspections of work; 100 per cent of decisions made within statutory timescales; four Traffic Regulation Orders and 3 Controlled Parking Zones (one due for implementation in September/October 2008), Town centre developments, strategies, design statements, urban transport plans, transport feasibility studies and urban design landscape advice.

The Portfolio Holder was pleased to advise the Committee that a grant of nearly £400K for planning delivery and nearly £900K GAF funding to start infrastructure improvement in North Herts had been awarded.

The Committee noted that there had been a number of legislative changes since 2003: The Planning Act 2004, Sub National Review 2007 and The Planning Bill was in progress through Parliament which included a fundamental review of the Permitted Development System due to come into force in 12 months time.

The Chairman thanked the Portfolio Holder for his excellent presentation and the Portfolio Holder responded to questions on enforcement, policy regarding retrospective planning applications, residential development to the east of Luton into North Herts, link road from the M1 to the A505, The Hitchin Transport Plan, The Local Development Framework (which will ultimately replace Local Plan No. 2 (with Alterations)) and the numbering of houses. Of particular interest was the development west of the A1(M) and the encroachment into North Herts, which the Portfolio Holder said would be hard to resist as 16,000 homes were needed in the Stevenage area. Mention was also made about the next Conservation Area Review in Hitchin and the involvement of Hitchin Committee. In reply the Portfolio Holder confirmed that nine conservation area reviews had been completed recently in North Herts and with ongoing town centre developments it would be some time before officers could prepare terms of reference for Hitchin.

**RESOLVED:** That the NHDC Portfolio holder for Transport and Planning be thanked for the informative presentation.

**50. RESTRICTION ON SUNDAY PARKING IN MARKET PLACE, HITCHIN**

The Head of Planning and Building Control (HPC) thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and reminded the Committee that at the meeting held on 22 July 2008 (Minute 30 refers) a request had been made for information that would lead to a decision being made on an alteration to Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO) applicable in Market Place and High Street to restrict parking of vehicles on a Sunday.

The proposals made by the Committee on 22 July were as follows:

1. 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. Extend the no access for vehicles on a Sunday in High Street, Hitchin until 08.00 on a Monday.

The HPC advised the Committee that it could take up to three months to alter a TRO and would depend on the number of objections received and the cost could be in the order of £5000 in total. The HPC confirmed that these proposals had the support of officers but there was currently no resource available in the Projects Team within Planning Services to undertake this work and given the specialist nature of such work it would be necessary to outsource it to consultants. The HPC agreed that it would be appropriate to undertake some pre-consultation with local businesses and St. Mary's Church prior to the publishing of the intent to make alterations to the TROs.

With regard to the TRO applicable to the High Street the HPC proposed that it might be more appropriate to restrict the closure of the High Street to 16.00 on a Sunday as early morning deliveries on a Monday could be affected by a restriction until 08.00 on a Monday, however, in response to a question the HPC agreed to review further the times of no parking in the High Street on a Saturday and Sunday beyond 16.00.

The Chairman thanked the HPC for the report and invited the Committee to comment on the proposals. The Committee considered the proposals to be worthy of further work but were unable to agree on a commitment of funds from the 2008-2009 Discretionary budget unless there could be a virement from the Central Area Budget or the Capital Visioning Budget. The HPC confirmed that funds for TROs could not be vired from Capital Visioning Projects. The CDO suggested that perhaps some pre-allocated funds could be allocated from ward budgets or perhaps an application to the JMP Discretionary budget might be appropriate.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the contents of the report be noted;
- (2) That the proposal to alter the Market Place Parking Traffic Regulation Order to exclude free parking on a Sunday from 08.00 to 18.00 be agreed;

- (3) That the proposal to alter the High Street Traffic Regulation Order to include the prohibition of vehicles on a Sunday from 10.00 to 16.00 be noted;
- (4) That the Head of Planning and Building Control be requested to undertake further investigation as to the feasibility of extending the time of 16.00 on a Saturday and Sunday in the High Street without affecting the needs of the business community;
- (5) That the Community Development Officer be requested to investigate the possibility of allocating funds from the Central Area Grants Budget for 2008-2009 that would allow the alteration to the Traffic Regulation Orders to proceed;

**51. HITCHIN TOWN CENTRE MANAGER**

The Hitchin Town Manager (HTM) thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and confirmed that he might be able to provide under sub contract to Hertfordshire Highways a service that could open and close the High Street barrier on a Sunday. The prospect of a refurbishment to the current retail outlets at Churchgate had the support of the Town Centre Initiative and expected that the respective planning application would be determined at the meeting of the Planning Control Committee to be held on 16 October 2008.

The HTM advised the Committee that the management of Hitchin Market on transfer from NHDC was proceeding well. Proposals included the removal of some permanent stall and replace with good quality demountable stalls, provide shuttered stalls to provide kiosk trading. This latter proposal was in response to enquiries from traders at the indoor market in Letchworth Garden City, however, there would be a need for investment of approximately £70K and sources of funding were being investigated.

The HTM advised that the appeal for funds to provide Christmas Lights was well underway with a need for greater support this year as catenary wire across roads had to be replaced, savings were to be considered in other areas which could mean less festive illumination in 2008.

The HTM concluded his presentation with an invitation to all Hitchin Councillors to the Hitchin Town Centre Initiative AGM to be held on 14 January 2009.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the Hitchin Town Centre Manager be thanked for the information provided;
- (2) That the proposal by the Hitchin Town Centre Manager to provide a resource to open and close the High Street Barrier on a Sunday be welcomed;

**52. CHAMPION NEWS**

The Community Development Officer (CDO) provided a comprehensive update on her activities since the meeting of the Hitchin Committee held on 22 July 2008 and updated the Committee on the following: Buzzworks – Congratulations on third place in the Best Community Project competition run by Kitchen Garden Magazine and NAG Trust; Oughtonhead Common – Official launch will be on 26 September followed by a moth evening and an evening bat walk; Bus Shelters – redundant bus shelters at Hitchin Station will be re-erected at Halsey Drive and Redhill Road, hopefully this Autumn, with all costs met by Herts County Council; Hitchin Residents Alliance – the next meeting will be held on 15 October 2008 - on 13 August 2008 the Alliance had requested that the Hitchin Committee should seek a cost estimate to introduce a pedestrian phase at Cadwell Lane/Wilbury Way crossroads; TASTE – following the first event on 6 September where various youth providers had information it was agreed that an annual event with demonstrations would be a good idea; Shopmobility – there had been an increase in the use of Shopmobility vehicles in the first six months of 2008; The Voice – met on 15 September with the AGM planned for October 2008.

The Committee were in support of the request to place a pedestrian phase into the traffic lights at Cadwell Lane/Wilbury Lane crossroads and it was acknowledged that the cost would be of a high. Again, with assistance from County Councillor D. Ashley on the best way forward it was considered that the JMP support for this work should be sought.

In response to an enquiry about ROTW that was highlighted in Town Talk for 22 July 2008 the CDO confirmed that the £1000 bond had been passed to the ROTW 2008 Committee. The CDO advised the Committee that representatives of ROTW would be pleased to attend the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held on 18 November 2008 and this was agreed.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the actions taken by the Community Development Officer since the meeting of the Hitchin Committee held on 22 July 2008 be noted and supported;
- (2) That the Community Development Officer be requested to make the appropriate arrangements to invite representatives from Rhythms of the World 2008 to make a presentation on the 2008 Festival at the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held on 18 November 2008.
- (3) That the Committee confirmed their support for a pedestrian phase to the traffic lights at Cadwell Lane/Wilbury Way crossroads.

**RECOMMENDED TO THE NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE HIGHWAYS JOINT MEMBER PANEL:** That the JMP at the meeting to be held on 13 October 2008 be requested to endorse the support of the Hitchin Committee for the installation of a pedestrian phase to the traffic lights at the Cadwell Lane/Wilbury Way Crossroads.

**REASON FOR DECISIONS**

To ensure that the Hitchin Committee are advised of the activities of the CDO, note the activities of voluntary groups and improve road safety for local residents.

**53. 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 and the grant application from the North Herts Minority Forum.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the expenditure, allocations, and balance of the current 2008-2009 Development Budget, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be noted;
- (2) That the Head of Community Development and Cultural Services be requested to present an updating report on Service Level Agreements to the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held on 18 November 2008.
- (3) That the Ward Members for Bearton be requested to clarify the amount of grant that would be awarded for an 'elderly persons crossing' sign in Bancroft and grass verge protection in Bury Mead Road and advise the Committee Officer as soon as possible for advice to the North Herts District Manager.

**RECOMMENDED TO THE NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE HIGHWAYS JOINT MEMBER PANEL:**

- (1) That the North Herts District Manager be requested to take note of the agreed funding amounts from the Hitchin Committee for the following traffic management schemes and projects:
  - (a) Grass verge protection by wooden bollards in Wymondley Road, Hitchin. 50 per cent = £750  
**No grant awarded** Wards: Highbury and Walsworth
  - (b) 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

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| (c) | Flashing School Sign in Wymondley Road<br>(location to be confirmed) | £1715<br><b>Grant<br/>awarded</b>                      | Ward:<br>Highbury  |
| (d) | Vehicle activated sign in Woolgrove Road.                            | £1500<br><b>Grant<br/>awarded</b>                      | Ward.<br>Walsworth |
| (e) | ‘Elderly persons crossing’ warning sign in Bancroft.                 | 50 per cent =<br>£1250<br><b>Decision<br/>deferred</b> | Ward.<br>Bearton   |

- (2) That the North Herts District Manager be requested to confirm the following:
- a. That at 1 (c) above the proposed sign is either a Vehicle Activated Sign or a Flashing School sign;
  - b. That at 1 (c) above the precise location of the sign;
  - c. That at 1(e) above the precise location of the sign;
  - d. That at 1 (d) above the precise location of the sign.

**REASON FOR DECISION**

For the Hitchin Committee to make decisions concerning the disbursement of funds in 2008 – 2009 and make appropriate grant awards.

**54. GRANT APPLICATION – NORTH HERTS MINORITY ETHNIC FORUM**

**RESOLVED:** That a grant of £250 be awarded from the 2008-2009 Discretionary Budget as a contribution towards the costs of providing baby changing mats, plastic bowls and games for toddlers and resources to promote healthy eating and mother/baby care advice.

The meeting closed at 9.59 p.m.

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Chairman