

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

HITCHIN COMMITTEE

Meeting held at The Roman Catholic Church Hall, Grove Road, Hitchin,
on 13 January 2009 at 7.30p.m.

MINUTES

PRESENT: *Councillors: Judi Billing(Chairman),Deepak Sangha (Vice-Chairman), Mrs A.G. Ashley, David Billing, Clare Body, Joan Kirby, Bernard Lovewell, Alan Millard, Lawrence Oliver, Ray Shakespeare – Smith and Martin Stears – Handscomb.*

IN ATTENDANCE: *Lynn Saville – Head of Strategy and Support Services
Ashley Hawkins – Consultation Officer
Margaret Bracey - Community Development Officer
Nigel Schofield - Committee Administrator
Keith Hoskins - Hitchin Town Centre Manager*

76. APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Paul Clark.

77. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting, thanked all those who attended the Town Talk including Councillor David Kissane from Stevenage Borough Council and gave best wishes to all for 2009.

The Chairman proposed and it was agreed to offer the congratulations of the Hitchin Committee to Mrs M. Furr, the manager at Westmill Community Centre on the award of the MBE in the 2009 New Years Honour List.

The Chairman proposed and it was agreed to offer congratulations and best wishes to Patrick Candler (Head of Community Development and Cultural Services) on his appointment as Director of Cultural Services at Nottinghamshire County Council and a vote of thanks for his support to the Hitchin Committee and North Herts during his time at NHDC.

78. MINUTES – 18 NOVEMBER 2008

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 18 November 2008 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman subject to one amendment:

MINUTE 62 – PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – REFURBISHMENT OF CHURCHGATE CENTRE

Declarations of Interest

Delete at line 3 '*declared a prejudicial interest and*' and add at line 4 after inappropriate '*for them to*'.

79. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman advised the Committee that there would be one additional item under Public Participation viz. Presentation of a petition concerning rubbish and street cleansing in Florence Street, Hitchin.

80. 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.

81. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION –PRESENTATION OF A PETITION

The petitioner thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to present a petition to the Committee. The petitioner advised the Committee that the problem of littering in Florence Street had been a problem for a long time and despite several requests to NHDC there had been no improvement in either the removal of litter or representations to the fast food outlets in Nightingale Road to alleviate this matter. The petitioner stated that the gutters in Florence Street were never swept, rubbish was left from the take away meals eaten in Florence Street, bags of rubbish were dumped in Florence Street, broken glass and empty bottles are dumped on the footway.

The petitioner confirmed that the residents of Florence Street and Anderson House in particular were very concerned that little seemed to be done in street cleansing and rubbish removal. Residents considered that visitors to friends and relatives in Florence Street were reluctant to come due to the street condition and that Florence Street was becoming an unpleasant area in which to live.

The petitioner urged the Chairman and the Committee to press for immediate action on: an improved street cleansing schedule in Florence Street, regular checks and removal of dumped rubbish in Florence Street and if any action was possible to make the fast food outlets provide adequate waste containers at their premises.

The Committee were in agreement with the need to improve street cleansing in Florence Street and resolved that immediate action should be taken to improve the cleanliness of this residential area.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the petitioner be thanked for the petition;
- (2) That the littering from fast food outlets in Nightingale Road in Florence Street and reported lack of adequate street cleansing in Florence Street be noted;
- (3) That the Service Manager (Waste Management) be requested to take immediate action to remove street litter and dumped detritus from Florence Street and introduce an enhanced street cleansing programme that would remove litter and dumped detritus promptly.

82. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – HITCHIN LEISURE GROUP

The representative of the Hitchin Leisure Group thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee. The representative advised the Committee that the group was formed about three years ago with the support of the 50 + officer at NHDC. The group meets weekly on a Wednesday afternoon but unfortunately it was the case that not enough people attended on a regular basis to cover costs. In order to increase membership it was felt necessary to improve the range of activities and the type of invited speaker. In response to an enquiry the speaker confirmed that attendees were in the age range of 50s, 60s and early 70s and that there was no plan to expand the age range as it tended to select itself by the time of the meetings.

The Chairman thanked the speaker for the presentation and advised the Committee that a grant application from the Hitchin Leisure Group would be determined at Agenda Item 9.

RESOLVED: That the representative of the Hitchin Leisure Group be thanked for the presentation.

83. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – HITCHIN SWIM CENTRE

The General Manager of Hitchin Swimming Centre (DC Leisure Management Ltd) thanked the Chairman for the invitation to address the Committee.

The General Manager (GM) gave a Power Point presentation which detailed statistics for the 2008 outdoor pool season, a review of the attendance figures and income associated with the extended swimming sessions in 2008, consideration of the request for additional sessions in 2009 and potential options for 2009.

Five sessions were booked in the period 30 July 2008 to 27 August 2008 with some 72 swimmers attending (real time total of 36), and unfortunately there had only been five positive swimming days in the summer season which had led to a loss of £649.70 despite the subsidy from the Hitchin Committee and income from a swim club hiring.

The General Manager presented a proposal for 2009 following the request from the Hitchin Committee and gave an outline of costs for 12 sessions at two per week during school vacations. The Committee were concerned at the costs involved and expressed the view that school vacations may not be the best time to provide extra sessions as the targeted user group (adult commuters) would themselves be on holiday. The GM stated that if university or college students were not used as lifeguards in the additional hours the costs incurred would be greater. The Committee also thought that one session per week over a longer period and outside the school vacations would meet the requests of commuters for additional sessions

The Committee expressed a desire for the continuation of extended swimming hours in the 2009 summer season and agreed that more financial information was required, that 12 sessions should be provided in the season but excluding August, and that a more pro – active publicity campaign should be undertaken. Accordingly the Committee requested that NHDC and DC Leisure Management Ltd should present a report to the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held on 10 March 2009 with a comprehensive assessment of costs for the revised schedule and the subsidy that could be made by the Hitchin Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the representative from DC Leisure be thanked for the presentation;
- (2) That the details concerning the costs for extended swimming sessions in 2008 be noted;
- (3) That the details concerning the cost estimates for extended swimming sessions in 2009 be noted;
- (4) That the Project Manager – Leisure Division be requested to present an updating report to the Hitchin Committee at the meeting to be held on 10 March 2009 with details of costs for providing extended swimming sessions at one session per week over a 12 week period, excluding the month of August 2009;
- (5) That should extended swimming sessions be supported in 2009 by the Hitchin Committee that publicity be increased at as many Hitchin locations as possible.

REASON FOR DECISION

To continue the support of the Hitchin Committee for extended opening of Hitchin Swim Centre in the summer of 2009.

84. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – NORTH HERTS ETHNIC MINORITY FORUM

The Director of the North Herts Ethnic Minority Forum thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee. By way of a Power Point presentation the Director provided details of the Forum and its move to Unity House and that the aim of the Forum was 'serving the needs of minority groups across North Herts' acting as an umbrella organisation for local black and minority community groups. The Director described the history of the Forum from 1995 to its move to Unity House and the activities and courses provided at Unity House of which projects to raise achievements of vulnerable children and young people and as an access and meeting point to reach ethnic communities. The Committee noted the vast range of activities provided at Unity House and the new skills courses e.g. advanced IT, dress making, dance and arts and crafts. Unity House hosts luncheon clubs, elders and women's clubs as well as involvement with socially isolated people.

Of particular interest to the Committee was the support given by the Forum to school children with 'Aiming High' to raise achievement of ethnic minority groups, including a Saturday club, booster classes for GCSE students which was now a county wide service. The Director was pleased to advise the Committee that the Forum was proud of its current partnership with NHDC, and others such as registered social landlords ,

North Herts CVS, Herts BME Partnership, Age Concern and the Minority Ethnic Curriculum Support Service.

The Director concluded his presentation with an outline of future plans: much more support to BME children in primary and secondary schools, provide more services to hard to reach groups, introduce family learning projects and work towards community cohesion.

The Chairman thanked the Director for the presentation and during a short discussion it was clear that the Committee were pleased to see the development of the Forum made since the move to Unity House. It was proposed and agreed that Hitchin Councillors should go to Unity House and that if possible a Hitchin Community Surgery could be held at Unity House.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Forum Director be thanked for the very informative presentation;
- (2) That the Hitchin Committee fully support the aims and objectives of the North Herts Ethnic Minority Forum;
- (3) That the Community Development Officer be requested to make the necessary arrangements for a visit by Hitchin Councillors to Unity House;
- (4) That the Committee Administrator be requested to make the necessary arrangements to hold a Hitchin Community Surgery at Unity House in the next Civic Year;

REASON FOR DECISIONS

For the Hitchin Committee to continue its support for the North Herts Ethnic Minority Forum.

85. DISTRICT WIDE SURVEY - 2008

The NHDC Consultation Officer (CO) advised the Committee that the District Wide Survey was carried out biennially (2000, 2002, 2004, 2006) and that the latest survey had been concluded towards the end of 2008 covering the specific areas:

- Overall satisfaction with NHDC;
- Satisfaction within North Herts;
- Priorities that would improve the quality of life;
- Use of and satisfaction with Council Services;
- Priorities for improvement of Council Services;
- The image of NHDC;
- Communication with and information provided to residents;
- Experience of and ratings of contact with NHDC.

The Committee noted that the 2008 survey sample size was 1012 residents and all interviews were performed 'face to face' in the resident's homes, with survey data weighted by employment status to ensure that the sample was representative of the North Herts population.

The CO was pleased to confirm that there were many positives from the 2008 survey although the results indicated lower satisfaction levels compared to the 2006 survey, but that general dissatisfaction with NHDC remained low and referred the Committee to Appendix A for the full results of the survey. The CO referred the Committee to the statements in the report to satisfaction/level of agreement and the overall percentage data as well as data specific to Hitchin residents, with particular reference to Paragraph 4.2 where data were based on actual users of each service. Ten (out of 14) categories gave greater satisfaction from Hitchin residents, two were less satisfied (Recycling and Public Conveniences) and three categories were more dissatisfied (Waste collection, Public Conveniences and Parks/Open Spaces).

The Committee also noted that 'Outlook' was well received, that Hitchin responses were generally in line with the overall levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction although care should be taken on the size of sample and the effect on such levels. The CO

advised the Committee that a percentage difference of 10 per cent was seen as being significant when data sets were compared (e.g. Car parks, sample size 194 with an increase in satisfaction by Hitchin residents of 13 per cent).

Hitchin resident's responses to 'which four activities the Council and its partners should undertake to make the area a better place to live' were:

1. Increase and improve facilities for teenagers;
2. Improve refuse collection;
3. Improve recycling facilities;
4. Improve street cleansing.

The CO confirmed that the first three key areas were in common with the overall survey but it was only Hitchin that had identified 'improve street cleansing' as a key area (this key area was rated joint 5th as important in the full survey). This confirmed that the key areas of importance as stated by residents were the same across North Hertfordshire.

The Chairman thanked the Consultation Officer for the comprehensive report and invited comments and questions from the Committee.

Several Members questioned the validity of sample sizes that were in the order of or less than 100. The CO confirmed that sample sizes of 100 could be considered reliable with less than 100 not so representative and that there was a core set of questions asked at each DWS. A Member challenged the validity of the data concerning The Local Strategic Partnership and the CO confirmed that face to face interviews could provide an answer in a positive mode. Also, several Members queried why only four per cent of Hitchin respondents were dissatisfied with street cleansing considering complaints made at recent Hitchin Community Surgeries.

The Committee welcomed and supported the responses made by Hitchin Residents to the DWS and considered that it was not necessary to commit more resources for survey follow – up other than request officers to ascertain why respondents were dissatisfied e.g. Public Conveniences and seek the views of teenagers as to their needs and aspirations for facilities.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the results of the District Wide Survey 2008 with particular reference to response from Hitchin residents be noted;
- (2) That the Hitchin Committee unanimously supported the need to undertake more research with teenagers about their needs for improved facilities for teenagers in North Hertfordshire as a priority;
- (3) That the Hitchin Committee unanimously supported the responses from Hitchin residents for improvements to: refuse collection; recycling facilities and street cleansing;
- (4) That the Head of Strategy and Support Services be requested to provide the Hitchin Committee with the respondents stated reasons for dissatisfaction (in services with dissatisfaction greater than 10 per cent – Waste collection, recycling, public conveniences, car parks and on-street parking) given by Hitchin residents in the District Wide Survey.

REASON FOR DECISIONS

To confirm the support of the Hitchin Committee for a biennial District Wide Survey in North Hertfordshire and the responses from Hitchin residents indicating key areas for service improvement.

86. HITCHIN TOWN CENTRE MANAGER

The Hitchin Town Centre Manager (HM) thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and provide an update on empty shops and premises within Hitchin Town Centre and confirmed the details applicable to the large ex Woolworths retail unit in the High Street.

The Committee noted the concerns raised by the HM concerning waste bins on the footway at Starbucks, the continued closure of Bancroft Public Conveniences and the delays to spreading rock salt on the town centre footways during the recent icy weather. The HM also advised the Committee that Hammersmatch remained intent on the refurbishment of Churchgate, that all conditions set by NHDC including archaeological investigation had been satisfied and could not understand the delay to the granting of landlord consent for planning permission.

The Committee agreed that the problem of the large waste containers on the footway at Starbucks should be resolved as soon as possible, although a Member advised that the position of a fire escape to the side of Starbucks could be a problem as the Fire and Rescue Service would not allow any obstruction adjacent to a fire escape.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Hitchin Town Centre Manager be thanked for the information provided;
- (2) That the continuing problem with large waste containers on the footway at Starbucks Coffee Shop, Market Place, Hitchin be noted;
- (3) That the Portfolio Holder for Waste and Recycling, the Service Manager (Waste Management) and the Corporate Legal Manager be requested as a matter of urgency take the necessary action to ensure that large waste containers are not positioned on the footway outside Starbucks Coffee Shop.

87. CHAMPION NEWS

The Community Development Officer (CDO) provided an update on activities in Hitchin since the last meeting of the Hitchin Committee held on 18 November 2008. The Committee were pleased to note that the SoundBase subzero under 18's Club had opened on 11 December 2008 with a full programme planned for 2009. The CDO provided further details concerning *inter alia*: Voice of Hitchin Youth, Purwell Residents Group; Cadwell Lane Residents/Hitchin Residents Alliance; Children and Young People of Westmill; Smartys Day Nursery; Triangle Planning Project, ROTW.

The Committee considered that a meeting should be held soon with Cadwell Lane residents to review the results of dust monitoring surveys undertaken by NHDC Environmental Health officers. The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Environmental Health also confirmed that resurfacing of the access road to Hitchin sidings from St. Michaels Road was expected soon and that Hertfordshire Police would as a priority step up checks on the weights of loaded lorries in Hitchin.

The CDO advised that proposals had been made for Sunday Town Centre car parking, that the Town Talk notes from the last meeting were attached at Appendix A and that Councillor surgeries at schools had yet to take place but a meeting calendar for each term in 2009 had been drawn up and on 12 September 2009 there would be a 'taste event' showing activities available to young people.

The CDO confirmed that the ROTW Festival 2008 Committee had provided a set of accounts (Appendix C) and that a grant application for 2009 had been submitted for determination at Agenda Item 9 (Appendix E).

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the actions taken by the Community Development Officer since the last meeting held on 18 November 2008 be endorsed;
- (2) That the Hitchin Committee did not support the proposal to designate car parking on a Sunday up to 11.00 at Portmill Lane, Hitchin for attendees at St. Mary's Church only;
- (3) That the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning and the Head of Planning and Building Control be requested as a matter of urgency take the appropriate action to resolve car parking issues on a Sunday at Portmill Lane, St. Marys Square and at Market Place, Hitchin;

- (4) 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 10 March 2009 providing details of progress to resolve Sunday car parking issues in Hitchin Town Centre.

REASON FOR DECISION

- (1) To ensure that the Hitchin Committee are kept informed of the work of the Community Development Officer;
- (2) To ensure that the car parking issues on a Sunday in Hitchin Town Centre are resolved as soon as possible.

88. ANNUAL GRANTS, DEVELOPMENT, DISCRETIONARY AND VISIONING BUDGETS 2008-2009

The CDO advised the Committee of the balances in each of the budget headings and current balance for each Ward, confirmed that there were three grant applications to be determined (Appendices B,C and E), that there were three Service Level Agreements uplifts to be agreed and four new Service Level Agreements for determination (Appendix D)

The Committee noted that there remained un allocated monies in capital, ward and visioning budgets and agreed that the CDO should contact all Councillors and any unallocated monies that remained should for example be put towards the Bancroft Hall, Parks and Gardens Project.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the current expenditure and balance of the Development budget be noted;
- (2) That the Community Development Officer be requested to make contact with each Hitchin Councillor to discuss grant applications and current unspent ward budgets prior to the end of the financial year at 31 March 2009 and budgets for 2009 – 2010.
- (3) That following decisions made at (2) above the Community Development Officer be requested to investigate the possibility of transferring any unspent capital budget to monies allocated to the Bancroft Hall, Park and Gardens Project.

REASON FOR DECISION

To allow the Hitchin Committee further the aims and Strategic Objectives of North Hertfordshire District Council.

89. GRANT APPLICATION – SRI GURU SINGH SABHA GURDWARA

RESOLVED: That a grant of £1,000 be awarded from the 2008 -2009 Discretionary Budget as a contribution towards the costs of road safety, traffic management and insurance provision before and during the 2009 Vaisakhi procession in Hitchin.

90. GRANT APPLICATION – HITCHIN LEISURE GROUP

RESOLVED: That grant of £500 be awarded from the 2008 – 2009 Discretionary Budget to the Hitchin Leisure Group as a contribution towards the costs of providing guest speakers to weekly meetings in 2009.

91. SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS – APRIL 2009 TO MARCH 2012

Declarations of Interest:

Councillors Allison Ashley and Joan Kirby declared a personal interest as the NHDC appointed representatives to the Hitchin Senior Citizens Welfare Centre and confirmed that they would not participate in the determination of a Service Level Agreement for Hitchin Senior Citizens Welfare Centre.

The Community Development Officer presented details of current and proposed Service Level agreements as detailed at Appendix D and the Committee following a short debate:

RESOLVED:

- (1) **Hitchin Link** – That the sum of £350 per annum be agreed as a Service Level Agreement for the period April 2009 to March 2012 (with this budget transferred to the Area Committee Budget each financial year);
- (2) **Hitchin British Schools Trust** – That the sum of £11,770 per annum be agreed as a Service Level Agreement for the period April 2009 to March 2012 (with this budget transferred to the Area Committee Budget each financial year);
- (3) **SoundBase – Sub Zero** – That the sum of £3000 per annum be agreed as a Service Level Agreement for the period April 2009 to March 2012 and allocated each financial year from monies allocated to the Hitchin Area Committee Discretionary Budget;
- (4) **Hitchin Town Centre Initiative** – That the sum of £7,000 per annum be agreed as a Service Level Agreement for the period April 2009 to March 2012 and allocated each financial year from monies allocated to the Hitchin Area Committee Discretionary Budget;
- (5) **Hitchin Festival** – That the sum of £2,500 be confirmed as a continued Service Level Agreement per annum for the period April 2009 to March 2012 and allocated each financial year from monies allocated to the Hitchin Area Committee Discretionary Budget;
- (6) **Hitchin Senior Citizens** – That the sum of £4,500 be confirmed as a continued Service Level Agreement per annum for the period April 2009 to March 2012 and allocated each financial year from monies allocated to the Hitchin Area Committee Discretionary Budget;
- (7) **Apni Duniya** – That the sum of £400 be confirmed as a continued Service Level Agreement per annum for the period April 2009 to March 2012 and allocated each financial year from monies allocated to the Hitchin Area Committee Discretionary Budget;

REASON FOR DECISIONS

To continue the support of the Hitchin Committee for local organisations on a regular basis for a confirmed time period.

92. GRANT APPLICATION – RHYTHMS OF THE WORLD 2009 FESTIVAL

Declarations of Interest:

Councillors Judi and David Billing both declared a personal interest as a member of their immediate family was a performing artiste at the 2008 ROTW festival and it was very likely that this family member would be performing at the 2009 ROTW festival and for the sake of probity advised that they would not participate in the agenda item.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That a grant of £10,000 be awarded in principle from the 2009-2010 Discretionary Budget to the Rhythms of the World Festival 2009 as a contribution towards the costs of the 2009 event;
- (2) That any further grant award to ROTW for 2010 be subject to sight of the financial report for 2009;
- (3) That any further grant award for ROTW for 2010 be considered in light of: a. The festival was no longer a town centre event and b. That an admission charge was made for entry to the festival site.

REASON FOR DECISIONS

To continue the support of the Hitchin Committee for local community events.

The meeting closed at 9.08 p.m.

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Chairman