

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

HITCHIN COMMITTEE

**Meeting held at Benslow Music Trust, Benslow Lane, Hitchin,
on 10 March 2009 at 7.30p.m.**

MINUTES

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

IN ATTENDANCE: *John Robinson – Strategic Director of Customer Services (part – time)
Anthony Roche – Assistant Solicitor
Barrie Jones – Head of Financial Services
Steve Crowley – Projects Manager – Leisure
Margaret Bracey - Community Development Officer
Nigel Schofield - Committee Administrator*

*Keith Hoskins - Hitchin Town Centre Manager
James Bliss – General Manager, DC Leisure*

93. APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Ray Shakespeare – Smith

94. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting, thanked all those who attended the Town Talk including Councillors Tricia Gibbs and Mrs C.P.A. Strong, officers from Stevenage Borough Council, the Chairman of Baldock and District Committee Councillor Michael Muir and Claire Morgan, Baldock Community Development Officer.

95. MINUTES – 13 JANUARY 2009

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 January 2009 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman subject to the removal of Resolution (2) Minute 87.

96. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman advised the Committee that there would be one additional grant application at Agenda Item 10 (Torque Tambor).

97. 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.

98. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND THE MAGISTRATES COURT

Mr Nicholas Moss JP thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and conformed that he would be attending all five Area Committees during the March 2009 cycle of meetings.

Mr Moss advised the Committee that the Magistrates Court had been requested to engage with members of the public much more and the vehicle for this was the Community Engagement Initiative. Engagement with schools had been good and successful, but it was just as important to advise members of the public about the

impact of offending, how courts deal with offenders and how fixed penalty notices work. For example, fly tipping offences which came before the magistrates court whereas Mr Moss noted that litter and rubbish was of great concern to individuals but these offences never came before magistrates.

The Magistrates Court would like to hear from the public about concerns and Mr Moss proposed that it would be very useful if he could be given the opportunity at a future Town Talk to discuss Community Engagement.

The Chairman thanked Mr Moss for the presentation and with the Committee's agreement proposed that Mr Moss should be invited to the Town Talk to be held on 22 September 2009.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Mr Nicholas Moss JP be thanked for the presentation;
- (2) That Mr Moss be invited to Hitchin Town Talk on 22 September 2009 (Westmill Community Centre) to engage with members of the public concerning the Community Engagement Initiative and the Magistrates Court

99. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: QUEEN MOTHER THEATRE GROUP – YOUTH WING APPEAL

Mr Richard Whitmore thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and confirmed that his presentation was in support of a grant application in respect of the Queen Mother Theatre Youth Wing Appeal. The Appeal was for £200,000 of which £120,000 had been raised to date. The Theatre was self financing and self funding and in 25 years had never made a grant application for structural works. £80,000 had been raised in the first three months after six major donations including North Herts Arts Council.

There was a great demand for youth drama activities in Hitchin and the purpose of the appeal was to provide enlarged space with a new workshop as the current space was at maximum capacity and the current workshop would be added to the drama space.

The new youth wing would be a multi-purpose venue, rehearsal, performance, studio and mini cinema. The new building would accommodate an increase of about a third and there was a long waiting list and would be available for use by schools during the day. Mr Whitmore commended this youth wing development to the Committee as a vital addition to current facilities and hoped that the Committee would look favourably on the grant application.

The Chairman thanked Mr Whitmore for the presentation and it agreed to consider the grant application at Agenda Item 10.

RESOLVED

- (1) That Mr Richard Whitmore be thanked for the presentation;
- (2) That determination of the grant application be resolved at Agenda Item 10.

100. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: TORQUE TAMBOR

Further to the musical interlude provided during Town Talk by Torque Tambor the Committee:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the members of Torque Tambour be thanked for the musical presentation made during Hitchin Town Talk;
- (2) That determination of the grant application be resolved at Agenda Item 10.

101. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: COMMUNITY RADIO (GROUNDWORK)

Mr Endersby thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and the purpose of the presentation was simply to raise awareness of the exciting developments concerning a Community Radio Station. Following an initiative from young people on the Westmill Estate, local community groups and Groundwork a grant had been secured from Big Spend of £100,000 to host a local radio station at Westmill Community Centre during the school summer holidays in 2009. The station would be 'on air' Monday to Friday from 12 noon to 10 pm and a broadcasting licence had been granted by Ofcom that gave coverage for Hitchin.

The purpose was to provide a forum to cover all issues that were important to the youth of Hitchin, and took as an example a very successful community radio station held in Stevenage.

Although this project was agreed and would take place this summer Mr Endersby thanked the Committee for their support and confirmed that a letter of support to the Rewind Project in Stevenage would be most welcome.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Mr Graeme Endersby be thanked for the information provided on the Community Radio project proposed for Westmill this summer;
- (2) That the Community Development Officer be requested to send a letter on behalf of the Hitchin Committee to the Rewind Project in Stevenage expressing its unanimous support for this community youth project.

102. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: TRIANGLE COMMUNITY GARDEN

Vicky Wyre thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and proceeded to give a comprehensive and detailed description of the work undertaken and progress made since the Triangle Community Garden started nearly ten years ago. A plot of overgrown public space in Ransom's Recreation ground was identified as a possible site and permission was given by NHDC in 1999 to develop a Community Garden.

Since that date there had been remarkable progress where local residents had learnt new skills, made creative projects, worked in teams, adopted green issues such as recycling, composting and protecting the environment. A design for the Garden was prepared and grants obtained from landfill tax, local PCT, small grants and the Bearton Councillors. Monthly activity sessions on the fourth Sunday are still well supported, with new features and regular maintenance. Each summer there has been an Open Day much akin to a garden fete which raises funds for essentials such as insurance and postage, An apple day in Hitchin Market Place each October raised funds for replacement plants and tools. Promotion of the Garden is via a quarterly news letter, local media, posters and website.

Unfortunately there had been an increase in vandalism within the Garden, especially litter, cans and broken glass on a Friday night in the flower beds and vegetable beds. There was often a delay in the clearance of such material by NHDC Grounds Maintenance resulting in litter left in the Garden over the weekend. Reportage to local police and crime prevention officer had highlighted this problem and measures such as rotten grass clippings in parts of the Garden had some effect.

An important recent development was the introduction of weekly gardening sessions for people with learning difficulties as a pilot project and the Garden had entered into a partnership with the 'Growing People Project' to promote Horticultural Therapy, partly funded by a grant from Waitrose Community Matters. Also a nearby overgrown allotment had been reclaimed for vegetables and a wildlife habitat for slow worms.

The next project proposed project was the renovation of the Ramsome's Rec. Pavilion (north part) with the south part retained for sports teams. Architects plans had been prepared and funding sought from WREN and Biffaward, Football Foundation as well as a confirmed funding from NHDC for part renovation for the whole pavilion. Also, an application had been made to Grassroots to fund schools visits and improve the Garden as an educational resource.

Ms Wyre concluded her presentation with an outline of plans for the tenth anniversary year, dye plants, spinning workshops, basket weaving using hedgerow plants, a mosaic footpath, new shrub planting, an open air teaching cum display space with removable roof.

The Chairman thanked Ms Wyre for a very full and informative presentation and complimented all concerned at the Triangle Community Garden for the achievements in the last ten years.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Vicky Wyre be thanked for the presentation and update on progress with the Triangle Community Garden;
- (2) That the problems with vandalism and litter in the Triangle Community Garden be noted.

103. CHURCHGATE AND SURROUNDING AREA – PROCUREMENT PROCESS UPDATE

The Chairman thanked the Assistant Solicitor for the update on the procurement process and the Committee noted the continued need for confidentiality under the requirements of competitive dialogue.

Mr M. Moulton thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and explained that the main purpose of his presentation was to seek clarification as to why there had been no contact from the Hitchin Town Centre Working Party as proposed by the Hitchin Committee at its meeting held on 18 November 2008 (Minute 62 (2) refers).

Mr Moulton described to the Committee the approach by Hammersmatch to its proposed refurbishment scheme and any potential interaction with the selected tenderer for Churchgate and the surrounding area. Mr Moulton contended that all proposals by Hammersmatch complied with NHDC planning policies and should a major scheme be sanctioned then the likelihood of a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) for interests held by Hammersmatch may not be confirmed until c 2015. Mr Moulton also contended that there was no guarantee that any CPO would be successful.

Mr Moulton advised the Committee that the proposed refurbishment would be completed well before 2015 but Hammersmatch would not proceed with refurbishment until the possibility of a CPO was removed and consequently proposed that the current Churchgate Centre should be excluded from the proposed Churchgate and Surrounding Area with a revised brief issued to the two preferred bidders.

Mr Moulton concluded his presentation with a request that the Hitchin Committee support his proposal that Hammersmatch make a presentation to the Hitchin Town Centre Working Party at the next meeting scheduled for 28 April 2009.

The Chairman thanked Mr Moulton for the presentation and advised that it was not possible for herself or the Committee to ensure that presentations by Hammersmatch to the Hitchin Town Centre Working Party would take place. However, the Chairman proposed and it was agreed to request again that the Chairman of the Hitchin Town Centre Working Party should invite Hammersmatch to address the Working Party.

Upon enquiry by the Chairman there were no questions for Mr Moulton.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the details contained within the Information Note be noted;
- (2) That the presentation by Mr M. Moulton of Moulton Walker (representatives of Hammersmatch) be noted;

RECOMMENDED TO HITCHIN TOWN CENTRE WORKING PARTY: That the Chairman of the Hitchin Town Centre Working Party be requested to extend an invitation to Hammersmatch in order to make a presentation on the refurbishment proposals for Churchgate prior to the next meeting of the HTCWP currently scheduled for 28 April 2009.

REASON FOR DECISION

To confirm the support of the Hitchin Committee for the re-development of Churchgate and Surrounding Area that would be best for the residents of Hitchin.

104. HITCHIN OUTDOOR POOL – ADDITIONAL OPENING HOURS

The Projects Manager – Leisure presented the report of the Head of Leisure and Environmental Services and following the presentation made at the last meeting of the Hitchin Committee held on 13 January 2009 (Minute 83 refers) a revised cost estimate had been prepared and presented at Section 4. The Committee noted that the cost estimates were based on actual attendance in 2008 which had been low due to poor weather conditions and were pleased to note that any savings due to an increase in numbers would be reflected in the charge and conversely if numbers were low this cost estimate would remain and a loss would be underwritten by DC Leisure

The Chairman led a debate on the various options and it was eventually agreed that a slight variation to Option 2 would be the option to support and finance (subject to available funds from the 2009 – 2010 Discretionary Budgets) 1.5 hours for 6 weeks and two evenings per week. The Committee noted that there could be a reduced charge if Hitchin Swim Club hired the pool during this 6 week period.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the contents of the report and the 4 Options presented at Section 4 be noted;
- (2) That amended Option 2 – School Summer holidays, for six weeks, 2 evenings per week and for 1.5 hours per evening (6.30p.m. to 8.00 p.m.) be agreed;
- (3) That the Manager of Hitchin Swim Centre be requested to undertake a comprehensive and expanded publicity campaign for the Hitchin Swim Centre and extended opening hours this summer;
- (4) That confirmation of financial support for the extended opening hours be determined at Agenda Item 10.

REASON FOR DECISION To continue the support of the Hitchin Committee for improved access to Hitchin Outdoor Pool on summer evenings.

105. HITCHIN TOWN CENTRE MANAGER

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

The HM confirmed that the AGM for the HTCI had been held on 14 January and that membership remained at some 180, four members leaving had been balanced by eight new members. The HM provided a summary of the main events and highlights of 2008, notably the Hitchin Festival that had over 80 events. The Committee noted the many functions and meetings attended by the HM in 2008 and although a small loss was currently reported for the Christmas Lights 2008 the HM was confident that this shortfall would be met.

The HM referred the Committee to the work undertaken by businesses in Hitchin for 'The Heart of Hitchin BID' and commented that this was a unique opportunity for Hitchin to take control of its own destiny and deliver immense value from the funds raised by a bid. The HM thanked NHDC for the collection of the two per cent levy if the BID was successful and advised that the BID board would be voluntary and that the HTCI would continue to raise funds from outside the bid area. The HM identified some of the main parts of the BID proposal e.g. Safety and Security: Town Centre Rangers, Taxi Marshalls, a change behaviour campaign; Appearance: Investment in Hitchin Market, and annual decorative lighting scheme, more public art; Clean and Gleam: Trade waste and recycling, deep cleaning; Access and Parking: Reduced parking charges promotions, improved signage, more pedestrian only areas; Marketing, Promotion and events: inward investment, high impact marketing, a tourism and town trail. The HM concluded his presentation with describing the main reasons to encourage a 'Yes' vote and that postal votes had been despatched to local businesses on Monday 9 March 2009 and close of poll at 5pm on 6 April 2009.

The Chairman thanked Mr Hoskins for a very informative presentation.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Mr Keith Hoskins be thanked for the presentation on the HTCI AGM and Hitchin BIDS;
- (2) That Mr Hoskins be complimented on the preparation and development of Hitchin BIDS.

106. CHAMPION NEWS

The Community Development Officer (CDO) provided an update on all the activities undertaken since the last meeting of the Hitchin Committee held on 13 January 2009. The CDO made a request to the Committee for advice on possible dates that would be convenient to hold surgeries in local schools.

The Chairman led a debate on the urgent need for amended Traffic Regulation Orders applicable to Hitchin Market Place which would prohibit the parking of motor vehicles on a Sunday. The Chairman considered that conditions had changed a great deal since the refurbishment in 1993 and that there many more vehicles that entered an area that was best suited to being a vehicle free area on a Sunday. The Committee noted the cost estimate had risen to £6000 which would be a considerable part of the 2009-2010 Town Centre Discretionary Budget if an award was made even 'in principle'. Members considered that if this scheme went ahead that the public consultation should also include places of worship. The CDO confirmed that there were considerable funds in the 2008-2009 Visioning Budget but the problem to overcome were the items that could be allocated from the Visioning Budget and be in excess of the £15,000 *de minimis* ruling. The Chairman proposed and it was agreed that the Head of Financial Services be requested to advise the Hitchin Committee on an individual basis such schemes that could be *vired*.

Subsequent to the receipt of such information the Committee agreed that if funds could not be transferred from the Visioning Budget for such items as Traffic Regulation Orders then due consideration would be given to an award 'in principle' from the 2010-2011 Discretionary Budget.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the activities undertaken by the Community Development Officer since the last meeting of the Hitchin Committee held on 13 January 2009 be applauded and noted;
- (2) That the Head of Financial Services be requested to provide by way of an Information Note (provided directly to Councillors) the types of projects and schemes that could be financed from funds within the Hitchin Visioning Budget and *vired* to the Central Discretionary Budget, bearing in mind the *de minimis* sum of £15,000.

- (3) That the Head of Financial Services be requested to note that the Committee considered that the costs of traffic regulation orders could be a possible scheme financed from Visioning Budgets;
- (4) That the Committee were unanimous in their support for the extension of the current traffic regulation order in Market Place which would preclude parking of vehicles on a Sunday;
- (5) That the Committee were unanimous that should the *virement* of funds from Visioning Budgets to meet the costs of a traffic regulation order not be possible that funds should be awarded 'in principle' from the Central Discretionary budget for 2009-2010;
- (6) That the Head of Planning and Building Control be requested to include consultation with the representatives of places of worship in Hitchin as part of the survey work reviewing the 2004 Town Centre and Retail Study as a matter of urgency;
- (7) That the Head of Planning and Building Control be requested to present an updating report to the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held on 9 June 2009 with the outcomes of the retail survey and progress with the requested extension of the current TRO in Market Place;
- (8) That the Community Development Officer be requested to provide as an Appendix to these Minutes the next record of the meeting of the Cadwell Lane and Hitchin Residents Alliance.

REASON FOR DECISION

To accelerate the amendment to the existing TRO in Market Place in the interests of public safety and determine *virement* of funds to other parts of the annual discretionary budgets.

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

Declarations of Interest:

Torque Tambor Grant Application:

Councillors Judi Billing and David Billing declared a personal interest due to family connections and reserved the right to speak and vote.

Queen Mother Theatre Youth Wing Appeal

Councillor Judi Billing declared a prejudicial interest as a member of the appeal Steering Group and would leave the room for the duration of this item.

Councillor David Billing declared a personal interest due to family connections and reserved the right to speak and vote.

The Community Development Officer advised the Committee of the remaining funds within the 2008 – 2009 Discretionary Budgets.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the current expenditure and balance of the Revenue Visioning, Capital Visioning, Central Area Grants and Ward Discretionary Budgets for 2008-2009 be noted;
- (2) That the Committee were minded to make the following grant awards (Minutes 108 and 109) from the 2008 – 2009 Central Area Grants Budget;
- (3) That the Committee were minded to make the following grant awards 'in principle' (Minutes 110 and 111) from the 2009 – 2010 Central Area Grants budget;
- (4) That with regard to the grant application at Minute 111 (Market Place TRO) it was agreed that the allocation of grant should only be made if alternate funding cannot be sought by *virement* from the Capital Visioning Budget 2008-2009.

REASON FOR DECISION

To confirm the continued support of the Hitchin Committee for voluntary organisations and road traffic safety in Hitchin and determine *virement* of funds from other budgets.

108. GRANT APPLICATION: TORQUE TAMBOR BRAZILIAN CARNIVAL MUSIC AND DANCE

RESOLVED: That a grant of £1,250 be awarded from the 2008-2009 Central Area Discretionary Budget to the Torque Tambor Group as a contribution towards the costs of providing professional musical tutors in preparation for the Rhythms of the World festival in 2009.

REASON FOR DECISION

To continue the support for youth and music activities in Hitchin.

109. GRANT APPLICATION: QUEEN MOTHER THEATRE YOUTH WING APPEAL
Councillor Deepak Sangha acted as Chairman for this grant application.

RESOLVED: That a grant of £1,000 be awarded from the 2008 -2009 Central Area Discretionary Budget as a contribution towards the Queen Mother Theatre Youth Wing Appeal.

REASON FOR DECISION

To continue the support for youth and drama activities in Hitchin.

110. GRANT AWARD - HITCHIN SWIM CENTRE

RESOLVED:

- (1) That an award of £ 3,150 be made 'in principle' from the 2009-2010 Central Area Discretionary budget to cover the additional costs of providing additional hours for swimming as per Minute 104 (2);
- (2) That a possible reduction in the sum of £3,150 to £2430 due to additional hire by Hitchin Swim Club be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION

To continue the support of the Hitchin Committee for local residents' leisure activities.

111. GRANT AWARD - AMENDMENT TO TRAFFIC REGULATION ORDER – MARKET PLACE, HITCHIN

RESOLVED:

- (1) That an award of £6,000 be made 'in principle' from the 2009-2010 Central Area Discretionary budget to cover the estimated costs of amending the current TRO to preclude parking on a Sunday in Market Place as per Minute 107 (3);
- (2) That the Head of Financial Services be requested to make the appropriate arrangements for the *virement* of funds for this scheme and other Hitchin Town Centre schemes from Capital Visioning Budgets as a matter of urgency.

REASON FOR DECISION

To allow the Hitchin Committee provide financial support for road traffic safety in Hitchin Market Place.

112. REMEDIAL WORKS IN MARKET PLACE HITCHIN

The Chairman commented that at the Community Surgery held on Saturday 7 March several residents had re-inforced the need made at previous surgeries for immediate action in repairing the cobbled surfaces in Market Place and the approach to Churchyard. Not only were cobbles missing but in many cases the coursing between cobbles had worn away. Residents were concerned that the surface was in such a condition that if repair work was not done soon accidents where people fell over could be considerable.

The Committee debated this matter and were supportive of remedial works to replace cobble stones and coursing but it was estimated that the cost of this work would be beyond the potential 2009-2010 discretionary budget of this Committee. At the Chairman's invitation County Councillor Derrick Ashley was able to propose that a combination of funds from: Hertfordshire County Councillor 2009-2010 Discretionary Budget, North Hertfordshire Joint Member Panel 2009-2010 Discretionary Budget, Hitchin BIDS and if possible from the Hitchin Committee 2009-2010 discretionary budget could be used to fund such work.

In order to proceed with this matter the Committee agreed that the first step would be a request to the North Herts District Manager to make the necessary arrangements for a site visit and preparation of a cost estimate of such remedial works, a work schedule with a possible commencement date.

RECOMMENDED TO THE NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE HIGHWAYS – JOINT MEMBER PANEL: That the North Herts District Manager be requested to present to the meeting of the JMP to be held on 20 April 2009 a cost estimate and work schedule for remedial works to the cobbled surface of Market Place and the Churchyard passage, Hitchin in order that the JMP could place this scheme in the 2009-2010 Discretionary programme and seek match funding.

REASON FOR DECISION

To ensure that Market Place, Hitchin is a safe place for residents and visitors as pedestrians.

113. VOTE OF THANKS

As this was the final meeting of the 2008-2009 Civic Year the Chairman wished to thank all Members of the Hitchin Committee for their support, and with the Committee's agreement, proposed that at a Vote of Thanks be made in respect of the contribution by officers during 2008-2009, with particular reference to the excellent support from Margaret Bracey the Hitchin Community Development Officer and Nigel Schofield the Member and Committee Services Officer for the Hitchin Committee.

The meeting closed at 9.36 p.m.

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Chairman