

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

HITCHIN COMMITTEE

Meeting held at Westmill Community Centre, John Barker Place, Hitchin,
on 22 September 2009 at 7.30p.m.

MINUTES

- PRESENT:** *Councillors: Judi Billing (Chairman), Deepak Sangha (Vice-Chairman), Mrs A.G. Ashley, David Billing, Joan Kirby, Bernard Lovewell, Alan Millard, Lawrence Oliver, Ray Shakespeare – Smith and Martin Stears – Handscomb*
- ALSO PRESENT:** *Part Time.
Councillor Tricia Cowley – Portfolio Holder Community Engagement and Rural Affairs
John Robinson – Strategic Director of Customer Services*
- IN ATTENDANCE:** *Liz Green – Head of Policy, Partnerships and Community Development
Lynn Saville – Head of Strategy and Community Services
Amanda Phillips – Customer Services Manager
Steve Geach – Parks and Countryside Manager
Margaret Bracey - Community Development Officer
Nigel Schofield - Committee Administrator*
- Chief Inspector G. Camp – Hertfordshire Constabulary
Inspector S. Tarbert – Hertfordshire Constabulary*

34. APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillors: Paul Clark, Clare Body and R.A.C. Thake and Keith Hoskins, Hitchin Town Centre Manager.

35. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting, thanked all those who attended the Town Talk including Mr Nicholas Moss from the Magistrates Office and those making a presentation at Agenda Item 5.

36. MINUTES – 28 July 2009

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 28 July 2009 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

37. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman advised the Committee that there was no other business requested

38. 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.

Agenda Item 12 – Grant Application - CAYPOW

Councillor Joan Kirby declared a prejudicial interest due to her association with The Coffee Mill at John Barker Place and the Groundwork Trust and would withdraw from the room for the duration of this item.

Councillor David Miley declared a prejudicial interest as he was a Committee Member of CAYPOW and would withdraw from the room for the duration of this item.

39. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: HITCHIN STREET ANGELS

Mr G. Williams the representative from Street Angels thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee.

Mr Williams advised the Committee that Hitchin Street Angels would provide an on-street or drop facility and integrated safety net service for those in need. Street Angels believed that people in need, particularly young people deserve care. Needs of such individuals could arise from homelessness, alcoholism, drug abuse or other issue which caused personal distress or potential for physical harm. Street Angels maintained a non - judgemental approach to people in need, the Street Angel vision used an integrated community approach, volunteers were essential to deliver the service and would receive quality training. Mr Williams advised the Committee that the service would provide the highest ethical and legal standards with honesty, fairness and sincerity on a Friday and Saturday night from 21.00 to approximately 02.00 and be and Ecumenical Project to confirm the love and care of the Christian Community for those who use Hitchin Town Centre.

Each Street Angel service would consist of teams with 6 to 9 trained volunteers on a shift system with direct radio and mobile phone contact to HQ and the police and emergency services. The service would also collect and collate data as well as offering basic refreshment, basic first aid and if appropriate referral to the Police, North Herts Sanctuary, medical, transport, counselling and accommodation.

The Chairman thanked Mr Williams for the presentation and the Committee expressed their strong support for this initiative. In response to an enquiry Mr Williams anticipated a start date of possibly February 2010 and that once the project was underway that Hitchin Street Angels would possibly approach the Committee for grant support.

RESOLVED: That the information presented be noted and offered every best wish for a successful launch in 2010.

40. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – NORTH HERTS RAMBLERS

Rosalind Redwood the representative from North Herts Ramblers thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee.

Mrs Redwood confirmed that the Hitchin Hoop complemented and had common boundaries with the Stevenage Loop and Letchworth Greenway. Hoop was 18 km or 11 miles long and its purpose was to encourage public walking, the route was easy to follow, pubs and cafes on route and was accessible by a bus service at many points and the start/finish was in Hitchin Town Centre. The Hoop used confirmed Rights of Way, planned and walked out many times, across varied landscapes with a safety audit completed. The Countryside Management Service would provide Hoop roundels on Waymarks and Finger posts but the cost of printing a leaflet (A3 folded on eighths) was beyond this Ramblers Group and although approaches had been made to Parish Paths Partnership and to the Ramblers Association there was a shortfall. This walk would be included in the 2010 Hitchin Festival and listed with Health Walks, schools and sponsored walks. Mrs Redwood advised the Committee that if Baldock and Royston could provide their own 'loops/hoops' this would give the five Olympic 'loops'

The Chairman thanked Mrs Redwood for the presentation and the Committee expressed their support for the Hitchin Hoop. It was agreed that a decision on the grant application should be made at Agenda Item 12.

RESOLVED: That the information presented be noted and that and that a decision concerning a grant application be made at Agenda Item 12.

41. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – A MUSEUM FOR NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE

Mr K Morgan thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and confirmed that he was a member of the Hitchin Initiative Steering Group.

Mr Morgan emphasised that Hitchin Town Hall was the Community Centre for Hitchin and was used by local organisations throughout the year and that Hitchin must have a central venue that was large enough to cater for a wide range of users and the growing

needs of Hitchin. The Initiative was not opposed to a museum *per se* but considered that the Town Hall was not suitable for such a proposed use. Every opportunity should be taken to engage with NHDC as the combined efforts in turning round Hitchin and Royston Markets showed what could be done. The Initiative did not wish to see the Town Hall converted to a Museum for North Hertfordshire as a 'fait accompli' and that consultation with local stakeholders and local interest groups was vital.

The Chairman thanked Mr Morgan for his presentation and in response confirmed that Hitchin Initiative and local stakeholders had the capacity to take over the management of Hitchin Town Hall as a Community Asset Centre as had been ably demonstrated by the success of Hitchin Markets Limited.

RESOLVED: That the information presented be noted and that the commitment of Hitchin Initiative be applauded.

42. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – A MUSEUM FOR NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE

Mr D. Rice from Hitchin Art Club thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee.

Mr Rice provided a detailed power point presentation of proposals for the development of the Paynes Park site in Hitchin proposing expansion to the current HCC Library and the Hitchin Museum.

Mr Rice expressed his concern at the lack of public consultation regarding Hitchin Museum and advised the Committee that he made a presentation to the NHDC Cabinet on proposals for Paynes Park in October 2007 to which he had received no invitation for further discussions since that date. Mr Rice stated that the current proposals before the Committee were a change and improvement from the first presentation and as before the proposal was to retain Hitchin Museum at Paynes Park in an extended configuration and as a viable and superior alternative to the intended closure by NHDC and transfer to Hitchin Town Hall.

Mr Rice explained via his presentation the proposals using plans and diagrams and that this was a proposal in principal and no costs had been calculated and that he proposed to make a similar presentation to Scrutiny and Cabinet as soon as possible.

Mr Rice concluded his presentation by stating that the Hitchin Museum, Art Gallery and Library clearly and rightly co-existed at Paynes Park and that to separate them would be in his opinion cultural vandalism and that it did not seem appropriate to stop the use of Hitchin Town Hall by the many organisations and public and family groups.

RESOLVED: That Mr Rice be thanked for the information provided on the proposals for The Library, Museum and Art Gallery at Paynes Park.

43. HITCHIN TOWN HALL - A MUSEUM FOR NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE – DRAFT FEASIBILITY STUDY

The Head of Strategy and Customer Services (HSC) provided a detailed summary of the background to the commencement of the feasibility study and referred the Committee to Appendix A which detailed the four options proposed by the consultants for consideration ahead of the remaining feasibility work to be undertaken.

The HSC confirmed that this report would be presented to all five NHDC Area Committees in the September/October Cycle. The HCS advised the Committee that four options had been proposed by the Consultants and that following a meeting of the Facilities Working Group on 9 September 2009 an additional Option E should be investigated by the Consultants which was Option D with the following amendments:

- That the Workman's Hall area be retained as recreational/ community/ educational/ occasional exhibition space, as per Option C. Retained for martial arts and dance, but it remained too small for other sporting activities such as badminton;
- Consider the provision of a sprung floor in the gymnasium/hall;
- Include shower facilities in the toilets next to the gymnasium, already served by the kitchen, Cafe and storage area;
- Remove proposal for Shared Surface at front of Museum but to progress

Covered Street entrance only;

- Foyer Area to be considered for more gallery, toilets, and more office space/storage;
- Maintain Upper floors as per option D, but swap Local Study Centre with Education Suite;
- Provide a Roof Garden to reflect/complement current Physic Garden;
- Retain as much of the building in situ for re-conversion/reuse in future years;
- Provide costing information to allow lower cost options of designs- e.g. one lift (loss of Goods lift) rather than two currently shown, in option D.

The Committee acknowledged the work done by the Consultants and the Facilities Working Group especially the proposal for an Option E and the various floor space allocation for all options. However, in the ensuing debate the Committee were not satisfied that any of the four Options or the new Option E would prove to be acceptable bearing in mind the feelings expressed by stakeholders, local interest groups and members of the public. Comments made by the Committee included *inter alia*: Do not want to lose Hitchin Town Hall as an asset for major community use; no suggestions provided as to the financing of such a conversion of the Town Hall to a central North Herts Museum; what will be the content of the report to Cabinet on 20 October 2009 in light of the timetable presented at Paragraph 4.8; There must be a Museum in Hitchin but not in the Town Hall; the Town Hall must remain available for Community Use; Why were alternative options as other sites not considered for a North Hertfordshire Museum?; why were Hertfordshire County Council not involved more?; the Facilities Working Group had worked hard to achieve a solution but were set an impossible task; What alternatives were considered by Cabinet prior to the letting of the Feasibility Study; Option E was a mixture and difficult to comprehend; Option E was too expensive and not a suitable solution; too expensive to install a sprung floor in the gymnasium; a mezzanine would be destructive of the Town Hall's character, a good refurbishment/re-decoration of the Town Hall would be valuable; Access for people with disabilities not clear to the upper front area (including the Lucas Room), other than passing through a room already in use; where would the lifts be placed?; the timetable at Paragraph 4.8 was too short to reach a decision on such an important issue; why no apparent move by NHDC to discuss the changes with local interest groups as the will and ability was there; there must be a Museum in Hitchin containing the Hitchin Collections; the conversion to a museum could not accommodate two school visits of school children at the same time; storage of the 'collection' would be a problem as the store at Burymead was full; Cabinet must listen to all local organisations in advance before any decisions were made.

The HSC wished to reiterate that no decision had been made and that ultimately any proposed scheme would need to be a compromise that met the needs and expectations of the local authority, stakeholders, local interest groups, users of Hitchin Town Hall and members of the public. In response to some of the comments the HSC advised that Cabinet may not refer the project to Council, but a decision would be based on the facts contained within the Feasibility Study based on a new Option E; there will be a meeting with Hertfordshire County Council Library Service in October; that there were no costings available at present for conversion of the Hitchin Town Hall to a North Herts Museum as the costs would evolve out of the Feasibility Study; there would be a need to look at other options if the current proposals were discounted.

The Committee accepted the officer's recommendation to note the progress of the feasibility study and the additional Option E, but apart from one abstention were in agreement to make their views known to Cabinet about the need to maintain a Hitchin Museum and retain Hitchin Town Hall as a Community Asset and Engagement Centre.

RESOLVED: That the progress of the works to produce the Feasibility Study in line with the published brief be noted;

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

- (1) That Cabinet be advised that the Hitchin Committee did not support any Option proposed in the draft feasibility study which would end the use of Hitchin Town Hall as Hitchin's 'Central Community Centre' and that the large main hall should continue to be available for public use;

- (2) That Cabinet be advised that Hitchin Committee was committed to support the continued presence of a Museum within Hitchin that would include the Hitchin Collection;
- (3) That the Hitchin Committee requested that serious consideration should be given to other options for Hitchin Museum and a Museum for North Hertfordshire including those presented this meeting (Development of Library and Museum at Paynes Park);
- (4) That the Hitchin Committee supported the work of Hitchin Initiative and other local organisations pertaining to alternative options for use of Hitchin Town Hall.

REASON FOR DECISION

To ensure the Committee were kept advised on progress of the works relating to this important community facility and that the Committee position on the future of Hitchin Town Hall was clearly set out and understood.

44. WINDMILL HILL, HITCHIN – DESIGNATED PLACE OF PUBLIC ORDER

The Head of Policy, Partnerships and Community Development (HPP) reminded the Committee that the issue of a dispersal order had been discussed in January and March 2008 with specific reference to anti social behaviour issues on and around Windmill Hill.

The HPP confirmed that to date the Designated Place of Public Order in Royston had seen a marked decline in incidents of drinking alcohol in the DPPO area. Within the last three years a total of 432 alcohol related offences had been recorded in Hitchin and the Committee noted that this in itself was not to be used as a definitive figure for a DPPO with confirmation from the NHDC legal department that caution should be used as much of the evidence was not suitable to support a town based DPPO. However, Hertfordshire Constabulary had proposed under Part 4 of the Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003 to designate a specific area in Hitchin with a Dispersal Order which was outlined at Appendix A.

In support of this proposal Inspector Tarbert gave a comprehensive PowerPoint presentation on the background to DPPO and dispersal orders supported by evidence on specific 'hot spots' in Hitchin which the Committee found to be very useful in clarifying the need for a dispersal order within Hitchin (Appendix A). This dispersal order if supported by the Hitchin Committee would be in place for six months and subject to review by the police and stakeholders.

There ensued a short debated during which the Committee expressed its support for a designated area within Hitchin as a Dispersal Order and were pleased to note that Police Community Support Officers could issue notices to individuals and that there would be a press release following this meeting, visits to schools, signs on street furniture with maps, that Neighbourhood Panels had been briefed and details on the constabulary web site.

In response to enquiries about movement into new areas by excluded persons outside the designated area Inspector Tarbert advised that at the moment there had been no reports of problems on Butts Close or Ransoms Rec, and that residents in a designated area that were issued with a notice would have to leave the designated area for the prescribed time.

On balance the Committee were in agreement to support the Dispersal Order as a substitute for a DPPO and that Hertfordshire Constabulary should proceed immediately to implement the Dispersal Order as detailed at Appendix A with a request that the effectiveness of the DO be reviewed in six months.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the lack of evidence for the pursuance of a Designated Place of Public Order for Hitchin be noted;

- (2) That Hertfordshire Constabulary be requested to periodically review the need of a Designated Place of Public Order for Hitchin;
- (3) That Hertfordshire Constabulary be requested with immediate effect undertake the implementation of a Dispersal Order for the area outlined at Appendix A;
- (4) That Hertfordshire Constabulary be requested to undertake a review of the effectiveness of the Dispersal Order after six months.

REASON FOR DECISION

To ensure that the issues of general anti – social behaviour at Windmill Hill and other locations in Hitchin were addressed by the appropriate Crime Reduction Partners.

45. NEIGHBOURHOOD PANELS – COMMUNITY SAFETY UPDATE

The Head of Policy, Partnerships and Community Development (HPP) advised the Committee that Safer Neighbour Panels were established in North Hertfordshire in 2005 according to Home Office guidelines which Hertfordshire Constabulary designated five such neighbourhoods in Hitchin for Highbury, Oughton and Cadwell, Bearton, Walsworth and Priory. The objective of Safer Neighbourhood Panels was to provide the opportunity for local representatives, elected Councillors and the police to consider local issues, identify priority areas for improvement or resourcing.

The HPP advised the Committee that at recent Hitchin Panel meetings as to the merging of the five panels into one for the whole town. Whilst there was some merit in this proposal the first problem to overcome would be the commitment of several police officers on the same evening and that Panels were meant to be pertinent to a specific locality. Another consideration was the dominance of perhaps one town issue against a local matter and could have fifteen issues raised as to just three with only one Panel. The Committee agreed that the local community should be invited to comment on problems within their own areas.

The Chairman invited debate and the Committee agreed to retain five Panels following advice from Chief Inspector Camp that the original ward boundaries (pre recent ward boundary changes) should remain as re-arranging statistical presentation for areas with only a minor change (such as one extra road or one less road) would be expensive and time consuming.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the information and reasoning presented in the report on the proposal to retain the five neighbourhood panels be noted;
- (2) That the proposal to continue with the status quo of five neighbourhood panels in Hitchin be agreed.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To support Hertfordshire Constabulary in resourcing the locality panels in Hitchin.

46. HITCHIN COMMUNITY SURGERY - UPDATE

The Customer Services Manager (CSM) advised the Committee of the background to the Customer enquiries via the Hitchin Community Surgery.

The Committee noted the vast improvement in the operation, recording and follow – up to surgeries since implementation some ten years ago. It was agreed that all visitors to the Community Surgery must be recorded and that it would be appropriate to classify each visitor as such and not as a complainant and that the process must be maintained in order to reflect the needs of constituents.

The CSM requested that Members should advise her of any proposed changes to the Surgery Form which would be incorporated into a revised version and subject to the approval of the Chairman be used at the surgery to be held on 5 December 2009.

The Chairman thanked the CSM and Customer Services for the approach to surgery visitors and the follow – up process and expressed a view that a Community Surgery should be provided across North Hertfordshire not just in Hitchin and Royston.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the update on Hitchin Community Surgery be noted;
- (2) That the purpose/scope of the Hitchin Community Surgery be reworded to read as follows: '*Community Surgeries are available to the public who want to obtain information and advice, make their views known on a range of issues or enquire about local authority services and policing services*' and for the Customer Services Manager to make the appropriate arrangements for the amended scope be placed on the NHDC Website with immediate effect;
- (3) That all Hitchin Councillors who attend the Hitchin Community Surgery be requested to focus on the quality and detail of information placed on the surgery form to allow a successful outcome for the surgery visitor;
- (4) That the Community Development Officer be requested in consultation with the Customer Services Manager and officers make alterations (where necessary) to the Surgery Form as presented at Appendix A.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To ensure a consistent, timely and professional approach to the enquiries raised at each Hitchin Community Surgery.

47. INTERIM NHDC GREEN SPACE STRATEGY

The Parks and Countryside Development Manager (PCM) referred the Committee to the report of the Head of Leisure and Environmental Services which was presented to Cabinet on 8 September 2009. Historically NHDC did not have a single Green Space for its Parks and Green Spaces and this Interim Strategy had been prepared to rectify this and provide a n excellent value for money approach for the provision of Green Space in North Hertfordshire.

The PCM referred the Committee to the Options for a Green Space Strategy as presented at Paragraph 4.1, the proposed Action Plans at Paragraph 4.4, Appendix B and Appendices B2, B3, B4,B5 and B6 – Interim Green Space Strategy, Green Space Action Plan, Outdoor Play Facilities Action Plan, Outdoor Sports Facilities Action Plan and Allotments Action Plan respectively. The PCM apologise for the absence of Appendix B1 – Cemeteries and Closed Churchyards Action Plan which would be despatched to Members in the next despatch.

The Chairman invited debate and requested that Members should contact the PCM directly by email or telephone on any comments that they may have on the Interim Strategy itself or any of the Action Plans. Several Members commented on the possible closure of some play areas (Symonds Road and Dacre Road) and proposed that the comment column should read 'under review'. and that under - used or rundown areas should be improved and linked to other activities with as much consultation as possible with users and local residents. Also that the views of the Triangle Residents Association should be taken into account bearing in mind the recent development brief published by the Association.

The PCM responded that the interim strategy had listed play areas with little strategic value and consequently consideration should be given to their closure and acknowledged that consultation formed an essential part of any proposed closure and that he would amend the strategy wording to make this clear.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Interim Green Space Management Strategy, associated plans and maps as presented at Appendices B, B1, B2, B3, B4, B5 and B6 be noted;
- (2) That the comprehensive and inclusive nature of the Interim Green Space Management Strategy and supporting Action plans be welcomed;

- (2) That all Hitchin Councillors be requested to advise the Parks and Countryside Manager as soon as possible of any comments or suggestions that they may wish to raise concerning the Interim Green Space Management Strategy, associated plans and maps as presented at Appendices B, B1, B2, B3, B4, B5 and B6;
- (3) That the Parks and Countryside Manager be requested to note any such comments and incorporate such comments in his report to Cabinet on 20 October 2009.

REASON FOR DECISIONS:

To allow the Hitchin Committee to make comments on the NHDC Interim Green Space Strategy and note the combined single strategy and Action Plans.

48. HITCHIN TOWN CENTRE MANAGER

The Chairman advised the Committee that the Hitchin Town Centre Manager had tendered his apologies for this meeting and consequently there would be no update at this meeting.

49. CHAMPION NEWS AND FINANCE REPORT

The Community Development Officer provided a comprehensive update on activities since the last meeting held on 28 July and made particular reference to: TASTE Youth Event 2009/Hitchin Youth Spend and distributed a leaflet promoting the opportunity for young people in Hitchin to apply for grants from the Committee Discretionary Budget. The Chairman took the opportunity at this stage of the meeting to seek the Committee's agreement to the virement of £20,000 from the Visioning Budget to the Discretionary Budget which was agreed.

The Committee were pleased to note progress on the following: ROTW 2009 (full debrief still to take place); Triangle Residents Association – Planning Project; Cadwell Lane, Groundwork Youth works in Purwell; Westmill Steering Group (next meeting to be held on 21 October to consider progress on the Business Plan for the new Community Centre). The Chairman proposed and it was agreed to invite the ROTW 2009 Committee and the Triangle Residents' Association to make presentations to the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held on 17 November 2009.

The Committee noted the current status of available funding for disbursement as detailed at Appendix A and the CDO confirmed that there were two grant applications before the Committee for determination.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the actions taken by the Community Development Officer to promote greater community capacity and well being since the last meeting be noted;
- (2) That the budgetary expenditure and balances within the Visioning, Development and Ward budgets be noted;
- (3) That the Community Development Officer be requested to transfer the sum of £20,000 within the Hitchin Visioning Budget allocated to works on Windmill Hill to a new heading ' Youth Work' within the Discretionary Budget;
- (4) That the Community Development Officer be requested to contact ROTW and Triangle Residents Association and invite both groups to make a presentation to the next meeting of the Hitchin committee to be held on 17 November 2009.

REASON FOR DECISIONS

To ensure that the Committee are kept informed of the work of the Community Development officer and continue the use of discretionary spending to further the aims and Strategic Objectives of the Council.

50. GRANT APPLICATION – CAYPOW (CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OF HITCHIN)

RESOLVED: That a grant of £1,100 be made to CAYPOW as a contribution to the costs of providing support to youth work on the Westmill Estate, Hitchin.

51. GRANT APPLICATION – NORTH HERTS RAMBLERS

RESOLVED: That a grant of £1000 be made to North Herts Ramblers as a contribution to the costs associated with the production and printing of a leaflet promoting a circular walk around Hitchin viz. The Hitchin Outer Orbital Path 'Hoop'.

The meeting closed at 10.18 p.m.

.....
Chairman

