

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

HITCHIN COMMITTEE

**Meeting held at Benslow Music Trust, Benslow Lane, Hitchin,
on 17 November 2009 at 7.30p.m.**

MINUTES

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

IN ATTENDANCE: *Andy Cavanagh – Head of Finance, Performance and Asset Management
Mary Caldwell – Planning and Conservation Manager
Simon Young - Planning Policy and Projects Officer
Margaret Bracey - Community Development Officer
Nigel Schofield - Committee Administrator*

53. APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from the Chairman, Councillor Judi Billing.

54. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Councillor Deepak Sangha welcomed everyone to the meeting, confirmed that he would be Chairman for this meeting as Councillor Judi Billing had tendered her apologies and welcomed those making a presentation at Agenda Item 5.

55. MINUTES – 22 September 2009

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 September 2009 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman save for a correction that at Minute 38 it was confirmed that Councillor David Billing made a declaration of interest.

56. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman advised the Committee that there was one other item requested by Councillor Lawrence Oliver within five working days of this meeting: 'Parking issues in Cemetery Road, Hitchin' which with the Committee's agreement would be discussed before Public Participation.

57. 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.

58. PARKING ISSUES IN CEMETERY ROAD, HITCHIN

Councillor Lawrence Oliver thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and apologised for the short notice given but this was an issue that required urgent attention due to congestion caused by parked cars in Cemetery Road and adjacent roads in Hitchin.

The current arrangements of one side all day parking in Cemetery Road together with parking congestion in Standhill Road had led to the development of a Controlled Parking Zone in this locality and the procedures for the consideration of a Traffic Regulation Order were well underway. Following a recent public meeting it became clear that there could not be a TRO/CPZ solution that included Cemetery Road and Councillor Oliver advised that The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport confirmed that the parking in Cemetery Road was a matter for resolution by

Hertfordshire Highways. Consequently other parking issues would be resolved by a solution outside a CPZ. The Portfolio Holder had also advised that all proposed CPZs would be put on hold subject to the forthcoming NHDC Parking Strategy.

Councillor Oliver reminded those present that parked vehicles in Cemetery Road caused problems of access for the emergency services and funeral corteges gaining access to the Cemetery. Whilst this was a problem to be resolved by Hertfordshire Highways the problem of parking congestion in the Standhill Road Area remained. With the postponement of a CPZ Councillor Oliver expressed the need for an alternative partial solution whereby some form of restricted parking was necessary for the benefit of residents.

The Committee were very supportive of some form of restrictive parking controls in the Standhill Road area leading ultimately to a CPZ and a TRO for Cemetery Road. It was suggested that in order to progress this matter there should be a report to the Hitchin Committee on 12 January 2010 with the possibility of a referral to the Hertfordshire Highways Joint Member Panel on 25 January and that if possible the report should include the outcomes of any subsequent discussions between the NHDC Portfolio Holder and Hertfordshire Highways.

RESOLVED: That Councillor Oliver be thanked for the information and the Committee agreed that every effort should be made to alleviate parking congestion in the Standhill Road area and Cemetery Road.

59. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: MILL MEDIA

Mr Graham Endersby and Diane Headley representing Mill Media thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee.

Five youngsters who had been involved with Mill Media gave a short presentation of the two weeks broadcasting in July 2009 as 87.9 Mill FM from a cramped but versatile studio at Westmill Community Centre with in excess of 100 people involved during the two weeks, and formally opened by Councillor David Billing. Interviews were held in the studio for 'chat shows' as well as the broadcasting of recorded music. All the youngsters involved with Mill Media had experienced confidence building, career opportunities, show preparation, DJ duties, broadcasting, CV development and inter – personal skills. The Committee noted that all replies to the post broadcasting survey had been in the excellent category, with live on air the most popular form of broadcast and were pleased to note that a varied community had been reached by 87.9 Mill FM

It was hoped that Mill Media/87.9 Mill FM could expand its activities in 2010 to 2 weeks at Easter and four weeks in the Summer. However, if the 'station' was to grow and provide a more comprehensive service then a larger studio was required, improved on line presence, improved training, enhanced publicity which would require development funding in the first instance of £5,000 for the next three years and an estimated overall cost of £55,000 for three years. A short film was then shown of the radio station 'at work'.

The Committee complimented all concerned with Mill Media and noted the enthusiasm and strong confidence gained by all participants. The use of the MillFM film to promote 87.9Mill FM was to be encouraged and that an application for a broadcasting licence to OfCom would be supported by the Hitchin Committee.

RESOLVED: That the information presented be noted, that Mill FM be complimented on their hard work and enthusiasm and offered every best wish for a successful launch in 2010.

60. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – REMIX NIGHTCLUB

Mary Ward and Jason Hector representing Remix Nightclub thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee.

Remix was located in Hermitage Road, Hitchin and in addition to the adult programme there was a concerted effort to promote Remix as a destination venue for the 16 + and under 18 age groups promoted by Facebook, textbook, posters and word of mouth. For example neon themed events, DJs, laser shows in December, Saturday matinees, live bands, indie style parties. There were 70 16+ events in the last 10 months supported

by a general management plan including police security and adapted for differing age groups and all staff were CB checked. Remix had a zero tolerance to under age drinking and if necessary an 18+ area was cordoned off, with an ID required at all times. On departure all young persons were seen into vehicles, no one was allowed to wait outside and remained inside Remix under supervision until collection.

Remix had received a complimentary email from Herts Police as community entertainment centre and the representatives assured the Committee and members of the public that Remix provided a safe environment for all customers. Ms Ward advised the Committee that she would be pleased to discuss possibilities with Mill Media/87.9 FM.

RESOLVED: That the information presented be noted and that Remix be complimented on the provision of youth entertainment in Hitchin.

61. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – RHYTHMS OF THE WORLD

Mr Matt Wyle thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and confirmed that he was a member of the ROTW Committee 2009.

Mr Wyle advised the Committee that the 2009 festival had been a resounding community success with in excess of 26,000 visitors over the two days. The ROTW theme continued with groups from Iceland, Louisiana, Niger and Siberia and the festival was rated as a best budget festival by The Sunday Times and The Guardian newspapers.

Mr Wyle thanked the Committee for the financial support given by the Hitchin Committee and that the overall cost for 2009 exceeded £200K and without the voluntary support the festival could not take place and in order for the festival to be another success next year there would be a volunteers meeting on 16 November 2009.

Mr Wyle confirmed that the 2010 Festival would take place on 24th and 25th July.

RESOLVED: That Mr Wyle be thanked for the information and wished every success for the 2010 ROTW Festival.

62. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – HITCHIN LAWN TENNIS CLUB

Mr Paul Taylor representing Hitchin Lawn Tennis club thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee at very short notice and that it was very important that the future of the tennis club and the pavilion was brought to the public's notice. Mr Taylor provided a short summary of the history of the club founded in 1920, the facilities for members and visiting teams, tennis leagues, a fine example of a community asset where people acted on their own and little cost to the community and sporting facility for Hitchin, tennis coaching for all ages and abilities. Mr Taylor advised the Committee that the courts were due for resurfacing in 2010.

However, most people were aware that the pavilion suffered an arson attack recently which destroyed the building, and Mr Taylor confirmed that the Club's Committee had spent the last few weeks compiling an insurance claim and working up a design for a replacement pavilion. Mr Taylor advised the Committee that in April 2009 a request for an extension to the lease (expiry in six years) was made to NHDC but there had been no response from the Council since July 2009. Following the arson attack and a need for action on the extension to the lease a meeting was held on 10 November with NHDC officers in Bancroft Gardens. At this meeting the Tennis Club was advised that there would be no extension to the lease or the building of a new building pending the completion of a feasibility and grand design for Bancroft Gardens. Mr Taylor was concerned that Members may not renew their subscription next April if there was no pavilion or re-surfaced courts.

Mr Taylor requested the support of the Committee in resolution of the problems faced by the tennis club and that every effort be made to confirm the status of the club and the need for a replacement pavilion with an extended lease.

It was clear from the response by Committee Members that there was a shortage of information about the problems encountered by the tennis club on the extension to lease and new pavilion. The Committee noted that the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and

the Head of Leisure and Environmental Services would be meeting with the Tennis Club Chairman soon. In the ensuing debate several Members expressed dismay at the lack of progress on the development of Bancroft Park and Gardens which had been neglected for far too long, consultation had yet to commence which in addition to delays with Hitchin Town Hall and Churchgate was unacceptable. At the moment this was not a planning matter as the question of extension to lease which was strongly supported was more important. In response to a question on planning permission for a new pavilion the Planning and Conservation Manager was able to confirm that any new pavilion would require planning permission as it was in the Conservation Area.

The Committee agreed that a speedy response was necessary to ensure the future of the tennis club and that it was critical to secure an extension to the lease as soon as possible.

The Committee mindful of the need for immediate action:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Mr Paul Taylor be thanked for the presentation;
- (2) That the Chairman and Vice – Chairman of the Hitchin Committee be requested to meet with the Portfolio Holder for Leisure as soon as possible to discuss a way forward;
- (3) That linked to (2) above that the appropriate officers be requested to re-consider the extension of lease as a matter of urgency;
- (4) That officers be requested to maintain contact with Hitchin Councillors and the Tennis Club Committee on a regular basis.

63. CHURCHGATE AND SURROUNDING AREA – INFORMATION NOTE

The Head of Finance, Performance and Asset Management (HF) presented the Information Note of the Strategic Director Finance, Policy and Governance which provided an update on the ongoing process to appoint a development partner for the re-development of Churchgate. As at previous meetings the Committee were reminded of the need for commercial confidence at all times and that very little commercially sensitive material could be released into the public domain.

The HF confirmed that there remained one bidder – Simon Developments – with whom competitive dialogue continued but at the date of this meeting the HF confirmed competitive dialogue had not been closed. The HF confirmed that even with only one bidder the dialogue process would continue and a single tender was still required and would be assessed against the criteria set out at the beginning of the procurement process.

The HF advised the Committee that the intended programme for the assessment of the marking would commence with a meeting of the Hitchin Town Centre Working Party on 22 December 2009, followed by either the Hitchin Committee on 12 January 2010 or The Scrutiny Committee on 19 January 2010, Cabinet on 26 January 2010 and to Council on 4 February 2010. The HF confirmed the expenditure to date on Consultancy Support and Service, Landlord Functions and Planning Authority function to date since 2001 was £767K with some £200K recovered from the successful bidder.

The HF confirmed the arrangements and issues for single bidder status and that the single bidder must ensure that the bidder's sub contractors were charging competitive rates.

Overall, the Committee expressed their concern at the continuous delays in the procurement process and the lack of involvement of the Hitchin Committee and that if the timetable identified above slipped yet again that a Special Meeting of the Hitchin Committee be convened to assess the marked tender return. Members remained concerned about the vehemence raised at the Town Talk and perceived lack of Value for Money regarding Churchgate.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the content of the Information note be noted;
- (2) That officers be requested to ensure that the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held on 12 January 2010 should include a report on the assessment of the single bidder's tender for the development of Churchgate and Surrounding Area;
- (3) That officers be requested to include in the report requested at (2) above a more rigorous scrutiny of value for money applied to the single bidder;
- (4) That if for any reason the tender assessment report was not available for the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held on 12 January 2010 then a special Meeting of the Hitchin Committee be convened before the meeting of Full Council to be held on 4 February 2010.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To ensure that the views of the Hitchin Committee are heard and Hitchin Councillors are consulted at the close of competitive dialogue.

64. RHYTHMS OF THE WORLD – 2009 AND FUTURE PLANS FOR 2010

Declaration of Interest

Councillor R.A.C. Thake advised the Chairman that he was an NHDC appointed representative to the Hitchin Cow Commoners Trust and accordingly would remain for the duration of the item and vote if it was appropriate.

The Community Development Officer (CDO) presented the report of the Acting Head of Community Development and Cultural Services and reminded the Committee that the 2009 ROTW Festival was held on 4 and 5 July 2009 for the second year at Hitchin Priory. There had been some 16,000 visitors on Saturday and 10,000 visitors on Sunday. The CDO confirmed that the retention bond of £1,000 had been passed to the ROTW 2009 Committee.

The CDO confirmed that the 2010 event was scheduled for the weekend of 24 and 25 July at The Priory and that there may be a change to the layout of the site. The Committee noted the requirements of the Licensing Act 2003 and the continued need for a premises licence and occupational licence at The Priory and Butts Close respectively.

The Committee congratulated the 2009 Committee on a successful Festival and recognised that the ROTW Festival was very well established as an important multi – cultural event for the residents of Hitchin and visitors from near and far and that benefit in kind provided by NHDC Officers was invaluable. Following a short discussion it was agreed that financial support be made 'in principle' up to the sum of £10,000 from the Discretionary Budget for 2010-2011 as the question of charging made for entry meant that the size of grant may have to be re-considered. The Committee agreed with the continued need for a retention bond of up to £1,000 to cover the use of land and protect NHDC in the event of any costs or claims.

A Member queried the absence of a profit and loss statement for the 2009 Festival with this report and it was agreed that more information on the 2009 event was needed before a final decision could be made on the amount of grant for 2010.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the ROTW 2009 Festival Committee be thanked for the successful event in 2009;
- (2) That the Committee confirm their agreement to use Butts Close as additional car parking for 2010 subject to consultation and approval by other interested parties;
- (3) That an award of up to £10,000 'in principle' be allocated from the 2010-2011 Development Budget;

- (4) That should a grant of up to £10,000 be made in 2010-2011 a retention bond of ten per cent be held back to cover issues connected to the use of Butts Close and any other NHDC property.
- (5) That the Community Development Officer be requested to ensure that a profit and loss statement concerning the 2009 ROTW Festival be presented to the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held on 12 January 2009 either as a separate report or included in Champion News with an Appendix.

REASON FOR DECISION

For the Hitchin Committee to continue the support for the promotion of good community cohesion and cultural diversity.

65. SECTION 106 AGREEMENTS AND UNILATERAL UNDERTAKINGS

The Planning and Conservation Manager (PCM) presented the report of the Head of Development and Building Control was pleased to confirm that the nine appendices attached to the report (A to H) clearly showed the obligations negotiated for a particular site, for a specific purpose against those allocated under unilateral undertakings and agreed using the formula set out in the Section 106 supplementary planning document.

The Committee reviewed the nine appendices and the receipts of money from 2001 to the current year and noted that the receipt of monies had fallen due to the recession. The PCM advised the Committee that it had become more challenging in 2009 to persuade developers to accept S106 commitments and unilateral undertakings. The PCM confirmed that the allocations coming close to expiry would be the subject of detailed discussions in order to realise some payment rather than none at all. In response to an enquiry the PCM confirmed that if there was no expiry date noted against an allocation then there was no expiry date. Members also queried why there seemed to be a considerable sum allocated to schemes and projects but there appeared to be little expenditure and why was there no indication at Appendix A to the provision of affordable housing.

The PCM acknowledged these enquiries and confirmed that she would convene a meeting of the S106 Working Party (Councillors: R.A.C. Thake, David Billing and Paul Clark) as soon as possible to discuss the allocation of S106 agreements and unilateral undertakings, affordable housing, expiry dates, and consideration of referring schemes with a highways aspect to the next meeting of Hertfordshire Highways Joint Member Panel on 25 January 2010 from the meeting of Hitchin Committee on 12 January 2010.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the information provided be noted;
- (2) That a further updating report on S106 Agreements and Unilateral Undertakings be presented to the meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held in November 2010;
- (3) That the Planning and Conservation Manager be requested to convene a meeting of the Hitchin Committee Section 106 Working Party as soon as possible.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To ensure that there was a robust system for the negotiation and the management of the Section 106 and Unilateral Undertakings for North Hertfordshire and that any risks are managed in an appropriate manner.

66. CORPORATE BUSINESS PLANNING 2010- 2011: EFFICIENCIES AND INVESTMENTS

The Head of Finance, Performance and Governance (HF) presented the report of the Strategic Director of Finance, Policy and Governance and that Members' Budgets Workshops had been held on 4 and 5 November 2009. The Five Area Committees would receive the Efficiencies and Investments for 2010-2011 during the November cycle and the HF invited comments cum questions on the Corporate Business Planning Process and the Efficiencies and Investment Proposals.

The HF reminded the Committee that the Corporate Business Planning Process commenced with the draft Corporate Plan which in turn ensured that the policies and priorities of the authority drove the budget allocations. The Committee noted

The HF referred the Committee to the assumptions used in the strategy to formulate the likely Council Tax requirement as presented at Appendices A.1, A.2, and A.3 which detailed the 0.5, 1.5 and 2.5 per cent rises in Council Tax base figure. The HF clarified the savings target required to meet the Gershon efficiency target and referred the Committee to Appendices B and C which identified a potential £905K of efficiency proposals. The HF advised the Committee that although the base rate of 0.5 per cent had not changed since March 2009 the general fund estimate assumed a base rate of 2.5 per cent for 2010/2011 and therefore fund estimates may therefore change.

The HF referred the Committee to Appendix E and Appendix H which gave details of possible increases in Car Parking charges across the District and confirmed that any increases must be linked to the long term car parking strategy. The Committee discussed at some length the proposals for increased car parking charges and expressed a view that for Hitchin charges on a Sunday and in the evenings would not be supported and that 'on street' parking charges were not appropriate in Hitchin as this would have an adverse effect on visitors to Hitchin and the night time economy. Members also considered that the details provided in the report on the Car Parking Strategy was more about income than the actual strategy itself. It was also stated that it was incorrect to compare car parking needs and charges with each town in North Herts due to the individuality and car parking provision needed in each town. However, a counter view was put forward that even a nominal parking charge for Sunday and weekday evenings would boost income and not deter visitors. Another view was expressed that 'pay on exit' machines at car parks whilst incurring expensive start up charges would eventually boost income in the long term.

During the discussions on the overall Corporate Business Planning Process and Efficiencies and Investments it became apparent that the Committee required much more information before any additional recommendations could be made to Cabinet and it was agreed to note the information provided but that the Committee wished to reserve their position on the financial proposals and how Hitchin might be affected by such proposals.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the information provided on the overall Corporate Business Planning Process and Efficiencies and Investments for 2010-2011 be noted;
- (2) That the Hitchin Committee reserved its position as to making comments and recommendations to Cabinet subject to sight of and review of the final proposals for the budget setting process for 2010-2011.
- (3) That the Head of Finance, Performance and Asset Management be requested to present to the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held on 12 January 2010 the most up to date report available on Efficiencies and Investments for 2010 – 2011.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To allow the Hitchin Committee undertake a reasoned examination of the most up to date Efficiencies and Investment Proposals for 2010-2011 prior to the setting of the Council draft budget.

67. HITCHIN TOWN CENTRE MANAGER

The Hitchin Town Centre Manager (TCM) thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and he was appreciative of the consultation with officers concerning the car parking strategy and financial proposals. A survey conducted by the Initiative found that many car parking spaces were available after 3.30 p.m.

The TCM advised that the next meeting of the Hitchin Business Ratepayers on 1 December 2009. Hitchin Markets continued to do well, and it was hoped that the Woolworths site would be cleaned and used for displays before the Christmas season.

The TCM advised the Committee of the latest Christmas Lights fund raising event at the Queen Mother Theatre on Friday 20 November and that the Hitchin Initiative would set up a Development Trust to look at a Community Building Fund and asset management.

The TCM reported on new developments in Bancroft and that there had been some movement commercially in Hitchin.

RESOLVED: That the Hitchin Town Centre Manager be thanked for the information.

68. CHAMPION NEWS AND FINANCE REPORT

The Community Development Officer (CDO) provided an update on her activities since the last meeting including *inter alia* Hitchin Market Place – reinstatement of cobbles to be completed by 27 November in time for Christmas lights ceremony, Councillors/Youth Engagement and the CDO requested Members to confirm their availability for the proposed dates in December, North Herts Ethnic Minority Forum – meet next on 18 November, Westmill and re-development of John Barker Place to commence in March 2010, Democracy Week, Voice of Hitchin Youth, Rough Sleeping and Street Homelessness consultation day took place on 29 October at NHDC and an action plan will be drawn up.

The Committee thanked the CDO for the update and were pleased to note the increased community engagement. The CDO confirmed that the *virement* of monies from the Visioning Budgets remained to be completed including the £20,000 for Community Engagement which required determination as to Capital or Revenue.

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 ensure that the financial budget statements are completed to portray the correct allocation to schemes and projects for Capital, Revenue, Visioning and the Ward grants to the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held on 12 January 2010.

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.

The meeting closed at 10.18 p.m.

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Chairman

