

Hitchin Town Talk Notes – Tuesday 9th March 2010
6.30 pm – 7.15pm at Benslow Music Trust, Benslow Lane, Hitchin.

The Chair, Councillor Judi Billing, welcomed everybody to the Town Talk. She also welcomed Councillor Tricia Cowley, Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement and Rural Affairs.

The next Town Talk, to take place before a Hitchin Area Committee meeting, will be on Tuesday 8 June 2010.

Issues raised by members of the public present

- Parking Tilehouse Street
- Charlton Village
- Litter
- Churchgate
- Smithsons Recreation Ground
- Communication
- Status of West of Hitchin regarding housing
- Town Hall/Museum proposal

Charlton Village

A resident of the Village informed the Town Talk that the Windmill Public House was now open again.

Town Hall/Museum Proposal

Mr Paul Summers addressed the Town Talk with his suggested option for a Museum and Visitor Centre at Centenary House rather than the Town Hall. He considered that this option had a considerable cost saving and would satisfy the need for additional space to exhibit more of the museum's collection and that the Town Hall could continue with the established events.

The Portfolio Holder concerned was present at the Town Talk and had heard the proposal.

Parking Tilehouse Street

The resident of Tilehouse Street said that he had been told that the work on the enforcement of the yellow lines in Tilehouse Street would take place before the end of the financial year and as nothing appears to have happened to date he asked when the work would commence and be completed.

Litter

The resident mentioned litter particularly in Stevenage Road towards the Stevenage end. This would be reported.

West of Hitchin - Housing Consultation

The consultation period has concluded and the results about to be analysed. Most people think it a bad idea and there should be no intention of developing in any way and that it is recognised as green space. This of course does not stop a developer putting in an application.

The Core Strategy (Local Plan) will be going to Cabinet in December 2010. Another consultation will take place on the Core Strategy Land Allocation document and comments and ideas absorbed and a preferred option document produced which also will go for public consultation.

Smithson Recreation Ground

Fencing had been removed from the playground without consultation and this is causing problems with the Tilehouse Playgroup and pedestrians. Ransoms Recreation Ground and King Georges has also had their playground fencing removed. The idea of fencing the playgrounds was to keep them 'dog free', particularly for small children.

It was requested that a Report come to the Hitchin Area Committee.

Communication

The speaker mentioned that the Member of Parliament Peter Lilley was excellent at replying to Constituents enquiries. Also that NHDC had a policy re acknowledging and replying to enquiries. The officer concerned he added did an excellent job but there was a mixture of good and bad results with regard to following the policy from other officers.

He asked about the Members' attitude to communication from members of the public. The Chair absolutely agreed that she saw it as her job to reply to all communications. Cllr Clark said that he tried to reply to as many as possible but added that some Members also had day jobs.

The speaker said that there appeared to be problems in getting response from Councillors.

Churchgate

Much discussion took place on Churchgate and previous meetings and the need for secrecy.

It was stated that once the contract was signed on Friday 19th March then engagement can take place with as many people as possible to get it right for the town.

It was also stated that all Members have to work within the legal advice given but that after the 19th the processes will be discussed through the Liaison Forum.

It was also mentioned that the developer has enormous experience of similar projects.

The speaker said that the current Churchgate traders had put up with ten years of adverse reporting about the development.

Cllr Stears-Handscomb assured those present that Hitchin Councillors have raised concerns about existing tenants of the Churchgate and that they need taken care of and arrangements will be made for the tenants to meet with the developer.

The discussion ended with the residents being assured that there is no conspiracy and that everybody is working for the best for Hitchin and that all should work together for a good outcome.

Action Update from previous Town Talk Notes (12th January 2010)

River Walk

The Council has adopted a planning brief the aim of which is to try and establish a riverside walkway through Hitchin from Bridge Street to Starlings Bridge (Hiz Development guidelines attached).

The Jill Grey section was constructed by Shanley Homes and was to have been transferred to NHDC ownership a year or so ago under a section 106 planning agreement. At the moment there is no link across the Hiz to Biggin Lane and it would effectively become a dead end. Following the recently completed flats at the Bridge Street end the Council has secured improvements to the existing bridge and some funding towards a further bridge link at the end of Jill Grey Place across the Hiz to Biggin Lane. However, additional development is required along the Hiz to fully fund any link and it is envisaged that the Churchgate Redevelopment will provide the opportunity to move the project on.

Another issue is that the existing metal railings along the river in front of Jill Grey Place do not meet the standard for adoption of the footway by the County Council and this will have to be funded by further section 106 income from more development in the area.

It is understood that the existing footway alongside the river at Jill Grey Place was, and may still be if not transferred to NHDC, maintained by a management company at the expense of the Jill Grey Place residents and this might explain the private road sign.