

Hitchin Town Talk Notes – Tuesday 13th July 2010
6.30 pm – 7.15pm at Sri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara, 50
Wilbury Way, Hitchin.

The Chair, Councillor Judi Billing, welcomed everybody to the Town Talk.

The next Town Talk, to take place before a Hitchin Area Committee meeting, will be on Tuesday 14th September, 2010, at Westmill Community Centre, John Barker Place, Hitchin, SG5 2PG.

Issues raised

- State of Changing Rooms at Hitchin Swimming Pool
- Car Park charges
- Churchgate
- Town Hall x 2
- Car Parking – Stevenage Road
- Lovely flower arrangement on Hitchin Hill

Car Park Charges

The questioner asked that since the car parking charges have been increased is there statistics available re a subsequent increase in revenue.

An officer present said it was too early to establish this but that a full report would come to Hitchin Area Committee in September.

Parking at top of Stevenage Road

Cars are now being parked on both sides of the road and with the narrowing of the road the resident considers this has become dangerous.

An officer stated that this could be a safety issue but if not a safety issue then this could part of the Hitchin Town Review taking place within the next financial year. It was asked if the cars were parking illegally but there are no yellow lines.

It was also mentioned that there were out of date road signs which have been there for at least 10 years and it was asked if there was a mechanism to deal with this.

It was said that this could also be part of a the Hitchin wide Review.

It was asked if yellow signs showing new estates have a time limit.

Action - This enquiry to be investigated and reported back

Hitchin Swimming Pool Changing Rooms

A speaker said that the ladies changing rooms at Hitchin Swimming Pool were appalling. Shower heads didn't work, nappy bins overflowing and generally an air of neglect.

A second speaker agreed with this and said that this had been raised with the Manager by their group of swimmers.

Action – This to be raised with the relevant people.

Lovely flower arrangement

It was said that this arrangement had been sponsored by Tims Art Supplies and that more business sponsorship should be sought.

Churchgate

The speaker understood that there would be a 250 year lease on Churchgate and surrounding area.

He questioned why as usually leases ran for 99 years, 199 years etc.

He also understood that the Council's income will be dependent on lettings and he assumed that the underground car park income would be rental to the leaseholder.

An officer present stated that no decision had been made on who will operate the car park but realistically the Management Company are likely to sublet it to a Car Park Company.

The length of the lease was a matter of negotiation during the dialogue process and the Council was advised by both its professional advisors that 250 years was acceptable, as that was what was required by the funding market. There is no such thing as a 'usual' length of lease.

All contracts relevant to Churchgate were now available, with minor redactions, at the Library and on NHDC website.

The speaker continued that he had a letter from the Leader of the Council stating that there will be little change to the proposed scheme.

An officer explained that the proposals shown at the exhibition are Simons' vision for the development area. No plans are fixed at this stage. Although there is a risk of a legal challenge under the procurement rules if the scheme proposed changes significantly from that contained in Simons' tender as shown at the exhibition (for example it changes from a mixed use retail led development to a leisure centre and swimming pool complex) the Council will vigorously defend the right for the scheme to evolve and change as a result of the public consultation process underway. Best practice for any scheme of this type is that there is significant public consultation during the design evolution. The Local Planning Authority will expect public consultation to have occurred as well. The Council's Statement of Community Involvement for this type of development also requires it. For such consultation to be

meaningful, the scheme proposed cannot be 'fixed' by a restrictive interpretation of the procurement rules.

There are of course parameters which will effect what can be included in the scheme. Issues such as viability, the requirements of the retail tenants, the physical layout of the site, the surrounding buildings (both historic and otherwise) and many other issues will help shape the proposals as well. Part of the ongoing consultation is to help people understand what these parameters/restrictions affecting the scheme are so that an informed debate can take place.

A speaker asked about the Post Office site and was told nothing can be said about this at the moment but it has not been ruled out or in.

Town Hall

It was stated that the Business Plan has been assembled and will be ready to make the Bid to the Community Builders Fund.

A speaker said that at the meeting at the Sun Hotel it was stated that it would make no difference whether the building was listed or not and would not preclude it's existence as a museum.

An officer present confirmed that both schemes may still be possible dependant upon the conditions of the listing, and stated that there would be some implications with regard to time frame and procedures.

Complaints

A complaint was made about cyclists cycling both ways down the High Street and parking of cars on the pavement belonging to the Queen Street garage, particularly on a Sunday.

Action - It was requested that the police attend future Town Talks and that the cyclists issue would be taken to the Highbury Police Neighbourhood Panel.

The parking on Queen Street will also be investigated and reported back.