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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

HITCHIN COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 2ND MARCH, 2021

SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA

Please find attached supplementary papers relating to the above meeting, as follows:

Agenda No	Item
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8.	<u>PUBLIC PARTICIPATION</u> (Pages 3 - 14)
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To receive petitions, comments and questions from the public including:

- Getting Rooted – Hitchin
- Hitchin Band
- Hitchin Bridge Club
- Charnwood Community Management Association
- Citizens Advice North Hertfordshire

The Chair may take presentations from public speakers alongside their respective agenda items.

Please note that the documents enclosed in this supplement are submissions from members of the public.

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Agenda Item 8

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED:

“A Permanent Home for Hitchin Band” – Hitchin Band Accomodation Project.

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A permanent home for **Hitchin Band**

Introduction

The Hitchin Band organisation requires a suitable facility for Hitchin Band, Hitchin Community Brass Band and Hitchin Youth Brass Band to accommodate the bands' current activities and our plans for future expansion and development.

The organisation has outgrown its current rehearsal facilities, rented from Hitchin Rugby Club, and we are aware that the rugby club has plans to relocate within the next two years. The band also has plans to develop and further expand the organisation, increasing youth band activities and starting two additional groups.

This paper describes the current Hitchin Band organisation, sets out our vision for the future and the case for a permanent rehearsal facility and describes how we propose to achieve that aim.

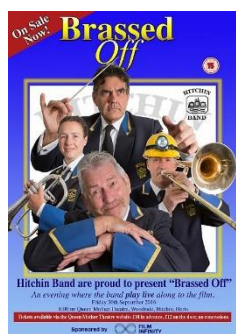
About the Hitchin Bands

Hitchin Band (The senior band).

Founded in 1866, Hitchin Band is one of the oldest brass bands still in existence. The band has had ups and downs over the years but steady development over the last 15 years has led to unparalleled successes. With a stable core of enthusiastic players under the direction of talented Musical Directors, quality of performance steadily improved. The band



began to win contests regularly and in 2012 won the London and Southern Counties (L&SC) Third Section Regional Championship¹. Representing L&SC at the National Finals later that year, Hitchin went on to win the Third Section National Championships. Further successes over the next 6 years led to rapid promotion through the Second and First sections to Championship Section in 2019.



In addition to a busy schedule of paid engagements, we have built up a schedule of regular concerts, including our extremely popular annual concert for Hitchin Festival, Swing concerts in the Town Hall, Christmas concerts featuring all three bands together, and regular concerts as fundraisers for other charities. Our screening of the film *Brassed Off*, with the band playing all the music live, was highly acclaimed. This was our first collaboration with Hitchin Film Club, a partnership that continues with our annual performances of *The Snowman*, which sells out 1200 tickets each year and is now a Christmas tradition for families in Hitchin.

The band maintains links with bands in and around Hitchin's twin towns of Bingen am Rhein and Nuits-Saint-Georges. We have a strong, well established link with the KKM Sponsheim band, with reciprocal visits every two or three years and plans in place for similar exchanges between our youth bands.

Hitchin Youth Brass Band. One of our proudest achievements has been the establishment of our youth band in 2009 and its continued success. A recruitment event in the town centre and demonstrations by senior players at local schools led to a handful of youngsters turning up for the first rehearsal. Word spread and, with further outreach visits to schools, the group grew to around 25. To make membership as inclusive as possible, we charge £1/week, which includes loan of an instrument. Some children have had some lessons at school and join us for the opportunity to perform with a group, others start as absolute beginners. Led by a professional music



¹ There are approximately 510 bands registered to compete nationally in the UK. In the London and Southern Counties region, 92 bands are registered of which approximately 80 bands take part in the Area Contest each year. Bands compete in 5 sections of roughly equal numbers, section 4 to 1 plus Championship. Other contests take place regularly throughout the UK and abroad. Performances are judged by one or more musical professionals and formats are either *set piece* (all bands perform the same piece), *own choice* (each band selects a suitable piece for their grading) or "entertainment" (each band performs a selection of pieces of their choice within a set time limit; marks are awarded for musical quality and the entertainment value of the overall performance).

teacher, our volunteers have undertaken individual and small group tuition for beginners and more advanced players. We ensure that safeguarding and health and safety procedures are fully documented, understood and applied. We are extremely proud that five players who started as beginners in the youth band have progressed to become full playing members of the senior band, whilst others have moved on to join Community Brass.

Hitchin Community Brass was formed in 2017 to provide an opportunity for players of all standards to rehearse and perform together without having to commit to lots of home practise and regularly attending rehearsals. One of our aims was to encourage those who might have played a brass instrument at school then given up for many years, who might now be persuaded back to playing.



Players pay a small donation (suggested £3) when they attend, and we have some instruments available for free loan. Community brass has been a significant success, with regular rehearsal attendances around 25 players. The band has performed several concerts and engagements, but the emphasis remains on playing together as a group for sheer enjoyment, whatever the abilities or limitations of individual players.

Charitable Status. The band became a registered charity in February 2020. Whilst we continue to be proudly self-funding, this gives the band a recognised status in law and the ability to be able to fundraise much more effectively going forward.

The effect of Covid on the bands. Obviously, Covid restrictions have had a major impact on the bands. For a few months between lockdowns, the senior band and Community Brass were able to resume rehearsals, hiring larger rehearsal facilities and complying strictly with regulations and recommendations, but for now we are unable to rehearse or perform. However, the organisation remains extremely strong. Members are regularly in touch and undertaking joint activities. We run a weekly online quiz and organise regular online talks and workshops with some of the world's greatest brass musicians. We set challenges for the youth band, providing them with backing tracks and music for them to perform and record. The senior band has made several audio-video recordings with each player recording their own part individually. Some of these were entered into on-line contests and we were extremely proud to be awarded *Most Entertaining Performance by a Championship Section Band* and *Best Trombone Section* in a worldwide contest hosted by the Cory band. [Our performance](#), featuring some fantastic views of Hitchin, has now been viewed over 7,000 times. Notably, since March 2020, members were offered the opportunity to reduce or suspend their subscriptions; to date, none have suspended payments and most have continued to pay at the full rate (Currently £25/month for those in full employment).

Our current rehearsal facilities

When not affected by Covid restrictions, all three bands rehearse in the Pavilion at Hitchin Rugby Club. The senior band rehearses at least two nights per week (with additional rehearsals before contests and major concerts), the youth band one night per week and Community Brass once every two weeks (likely to increase to once per week). The Rugby Club has been home to the band since 2008. It has served us very well; it is affordable, with adequate storage, to which we have unrestricted access. However, several factors now make it unsuitable for the band going forward. The original facility has been reduced in size as an interim step in the rugby club's plans to develop their premises. This means that the main hall is now only just adequate for most rehearsals and too small to accommodate a full

rehearsal with all the percussion required by a Championship band. The ladies' toilet has been removed so toilet facilities are barely adequate and are of particular concern as far as the youngsters are concerned. With the removal of the kitchen and a large changing room, there are very limited facilities for individual and small group tuition of youngsters. There is barely enough space if parents wish to sit and wait during youth band. Finally, but importantly, there are plans for the rugby club to relocate within the next two years.

Our vision

Building upon the success of the current three bands, we will develop two further groups: a second youth group and a lower-section contesting band. Maintaining our principle to provide affordable access to brass playing for all, we will cater for players of all ages and abilities and offer progression between groups as players develop. This will help to maintain the quality and success of the senior contesting band through development of players from within the organisation.

More individual and small-group tuition will be provided for youngsters and establishing a new youth group will allow beginners to enjoy group playing at an appropriate level then progress to an advanced group.

A lower-section contesting band will bridge the gap between the youth bands and the senior contesting band, as well as offering an option for adults who enjoy the challenge and commitment of contesting and might wish to develop their playing to a higher standard and progress to the senior band. Community Brass will continue to offer an option for players of any ability who want to enjoy rehearsing and performing together without the commitment required for contesting.

We will arrange events where players from different groups can socialise, rehearse and perform together. We will continue to raise the profile of the band in Hitchin through concerts and events, including regular outreach events into schools. The new rehearsal facility will enable this vision and will be the focus for all the bands' activities.

How would better rehearsal facilities support this vision?

The right facility would give all the bands space to rehearse, sufficient easily-accessible storage and the ability to properly develop the youth bands and youth tuition. Ideally, we would have space to accommodate joint rehearsals and other activities, combining groups or accommodating a small audience of parents for youth band activities. Tailoring the acoustics of the building would make rehearsals safer, more pleasant and more effective, and would make it possible to record groups in the building. As further groups are established, the facility would be in regular use by the band four to five nights per week, with additional rehearsals as required.

The facility would be administered and maintained by, and for the benefit of, the band but we would actively encourage use by other groups, particularly during daytime. Charging a modest fee to hirers would offset some of our costs but our principal aim would be to maximise the use of the facility and its benefit to the wider community.

A high-level specification for a suitable facility is set out on pages 5 to 7.

Summary of requirements

Ser.	Requirement Description	Threshold Specification	Objective Specification
1	Overall description of facility	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Main rehearsal room to accommodate full band rehearsal 2. Toilet facilities to meet legal requirements 3. Storage facilities for instruments, music and other equipment 4. A tuition room to facilitate one-to-one or small group rehearsal whilst larger groups use the main rehearsal room 	<p>As threshold plus:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Additional tuition rooms to facilitate one-to-one or small group rehearsal whilst larger groups use the main rehearsal room 2. A kitchenette facility for preparation of refreshments.
2	Main rehearsal room	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Minimum 80m² (860ft²) 2. Minimum linear dimension 8m (26ft) 3. Minimum ceiling height 2.4m (8ft) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 160m² (1722ft²) - would facilitate larger groups or a small audience. It would also improve opportunities for multi-functional use of the facility. 2. Vaulted ceiling - combined with suitable sound treatment would improve acoustic and facilitate recording in premises.
3	Storage facilities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Secure storage: minimum 15m³ with min depth 1m for instruments and equipment. 2. Additional area to accommodate Qty 7 standard filing cabinets for music (3.2m total width x 0.7m x 1.4m). 3. Separate lockable storage for cleaning equipment and materials. 	Additional storage would be beneficial, both for the band and for use of the facility by other groups.
4	Tuition rooms	One room approx. 4m x 3m with reasonable sound separation from main rehearsal room to allow individual or small group tuition whilst rehearsals are ongoing in the main room.	As threshold plus one or more additional rooms.
5	Toilet facilities	To meet current regulations for a publicly-accessible multipurpose facility.	As threshold.
6	Kitchenette	Facility adequate to prepare and serve tea and coffee. Sink with potable water supply.	A more extensive facility would be beneficial for multipurpose use of building. Segregated facility would reduce H&S risks.

Ser.	Requirement Description	Threshold Specification	Objective Specification
7	Location	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Within 5-mile radius of Hitchin. 2. Sufficient separation from residential property to avoid noise affecting neighbours (particularly in summer when windows may be open). 	<p>As threshold plus:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Within reasonable walking distance of good transport links to reduce reliance on private vehicles. 2. A location within Hitchin would be preferable. This would be of particular benefit for parents of Youth Band members. It would increase the potential use of the facility for other purposes. It would also strengthen links with the town. 3. A location with minimal background noise (away from busy roads or rail lines) would offer potential to use the facility for recording by the bands or other local groups.
8	Car parking	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Access to free or low-cost (<£1/3hrs) parking for min 5 cars within 30m of building for disabled and players of larger instruments. 2. Access to free or low-cost (<£1/3hrs) parking for a further 20 cars within 100m. 	Parking for min 20 cars on premises. Additional free or low-cost parking within 200m.
9	Lighting	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Interior lighting in main rehearsal hall and tuition rooms to be min 300 lux, evenly distributed. 2. Emergency lighting to meet legal requirements. 3. Exterior lighting to ensure safe entry and egress from parking/street. 	As threshold.
10	Heating and ventilation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Adequate heating and ventilation to allow year round use of the facility, maintaining reasonable levels of comfort for up to 30 players rehearsing for 2hrs. 2. Systems to be compliant with all relevant H&S regulations. 3. Where ventilation requires leaving doors and windows open, rehearsal must not cause nuisance to occupants of neighbouring properties. 	As threshold plus systems to be designed for low running cost and low environmental impact.
11	Power outlets	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Min Qty 2 x double outlets in main rehearsal hall 2. Min one outlet in tuition room(s). 3. Outlet in suitable location for water boiler (or fixed boiler installation preferred). 	As threshold.

Ser.	Requirement Description	Threshold Specification	Objective Specification
12	Acoustics	<p>1. Acoustic of main rehearsal hall must not be excessively live such that clarity is lost and rehearsing becomes uncomfortable.</p> <p>2. Acoustic separation between main rehearsal room and tuition room(s) adequate to allow individual / small group tuition to be undertaken whilst larger groups are using the main rehearsal room.</p> <p>Note. Natural acoustic characteristics can be treated if needed.</p>	Professional acoustic design or retrospective treatment to create ideal rehearsal and occasional recording facilities.
13	Security	Premises must be able to be secured sufficient to meet insurance company requirements.	Additional measures to reduce likelihood of break-in, theft or vandalism.
14	Access	<p>1. The facility must be fully accessible in accordance with the Equality Act 2010.</p> <p>2. Use by the Hitchin Band, Hitchin Community Brass Band and Hitchin Youth Band initially a minimum 3-evenings per week plus additional evening and weekend rehearsals. Planned to increase to 4 or 5 evenings.</p> <p>2. Access to music and equipment as required for concerts and events.</p>	Intention is to increase usage by Hitchin Band and other local musical groups.
15	Sharing with other groups	<p>Strong preference would be for Hitchin Band to have control of the facility with an option to sub-let to other groups. If shared control or a sub-let arrangement were the only option, the following would apply:</p> <p>1. Hitchin Band currently rehearse Mon, Wed and Thur evenings and will require access at other times.</p> <p>2. Where a facility has multiple function rooms, use by another group at the same time as the band may be impracticable unless there is effective acoustic separation between rooms.</p>	Facility under control of Hitchin Band with option to sub-let to other groups.

Our options for future accommodation

The following options have been considered:

1. **Remain at Hitchin Rugby Club.** We are aware that plans are being developed to relocate the club to a new building within around two years. In the meantime, we could continue to rehearse at the club whilst negotiating minor improvements (such as segregation of the toilets), but fundamental issues would remain. It may be possible to come to an agreement with the club to include Hitchin Band in their plans, but it is unlikely that a single facility could satisfy the different requirements and aspirations of both organisations. We would expect hire costs to rise and greater usage by the band would further increase our costs. As a hirer, we would have no guarantee of long-term tenure but we would retain the advantages of having no long-term commitment and no requirement for significant capital outlay.
2. **Look for rental options elsewhere.** Recent searches have shown that we would be very unlikely to find a suitable option in an existing community hall or similar. Where hire fees are reasonable, such facilities are near fully booked with long-term hirers and we would be looking for four or five full evenings. A further issue is our requirement for significant secure storage capacity, which we would be unlikely to be able to resolve. One possible option would be to seek a hire agreement at a school where multiple rooms might be available for youth tuition and there may be opportunities for storage. However, charges at schools are often high and access, particularly out of term time, can be problematic. Again, we would have no guarantee of long-term tenure but would retain the advantage of having no long-term commitment and no capital outlay.
3. **Shared use with one or more organisations.** This would initially appear to be an attractive option since costs and responsibilities might be shared; however, it would only be feasible if the other organisation(s) had little or no requirement to use the facility during weekday evenings. Conflicts of interests would be a significant risk and to ensure clarity around legal responsibility it would probably be necessary to appoint a lead organisation, so this option may be complicated. Whilst capital outlay would be less than for a building under the sole control of the band, it may still be significant and there would be long-term commitment to what may be a suboptimal solution.
4. **Build or convert a building for the band.** This is our preferred option. Capital outlay is likely to be significant and we would be committed to the management and upkeep of the facility for the long-term. However, this option would best meet the bands' current needs and support our future needs. Two sub-options have been considered:
 - a. **Conversion of an existing building.** – Suitable options might include an unused community facility, religious building or factory unit. This option may offer several advantages: it might be possible to be up and running relatively quickly, completing critical work up front then improving the facility over a longer term; it could be a good solution for reuse of a building that was unsuitable for other purposes; it may involve lower overall outlay. Potential disadvantages: the outcome is unlikely to meet all our requirements; it may require significant capital expenditure up front; there could be significant hidden costs; running costs and maintenance costs may be higher than for a modern building.

- b. **Construction of a building.** – This option would be dependent upon identifying a suitable site where we could secure permission to build. Provided the right site can be identified, this would be our preferred option since we could build a facility to meet our needs perfectly. Once permissions had been granted and services installed there should be no significant hidden costs. A new build would reduce ongoing maintenance costs and building to modern insulation standards and incorporating green technologies would result in reduced running costs. Capital outlay may be higher but, if the right agreement could be reached regarding a site, this option would offer advantages in terms of raising the capital. This has been a key lesson from the successful [Amersham Band bandroom project](#), for which securing a site gave the focus necessary to raise c£500K to complete the project in less than five years. Where Amersham opted for a traditional construction, non-traditional options such as prefabricated steel or Structural Insulated Panel construction may enable us to reduce cost, accepting that the choice of construction method may be restricted by conditions related to the site.

How would we fund a new build or refurbishment project?

Raising the capital. Hitchin Band has always been self-funding and financially stable. We maintain a working balance around £12,000 to £15,000, with any excess being reinvested in equipment or band activities. Raising significant capital for this project is a new challenge for the band but we have been given valuable, detailed advice from other groups that have succeeded with similar projects. Their advice includes:

- Securing a specific site or building is key to an effective fundraising strategy. It provides a focus for fundraising and assurance for donors.
- Employ a specialist consultant to shape a business case and fundraising campaign, to research prospective donors and advise on approach.
- Appoint one individual to manage all applications for grants.
- Set up a separate project bank account from the outset.
- Pursue every opportunity to raise small amounts and attract small donations.
- Engage all members and associates in fundraising.
- Engage the local community.
- Gift Aid is a valuable addition to funds.
- Sale of bonds to members and supporters can be a very effective way to borrow funds at little or no interest.

Ongoing running costs. The cost of running the facility will be dependent upon the cost of the lease, business rates, insurance, utilities and maintenance. Specific costs are yet to be established but using figures relating to Amersham Band's new development and existing local community halls, we are confident that costs will compare favourably with what we would be required to pay in hire costs. Charging a modest hire fee to third parties using the facility will further offset these costs.

The cost of hiring rehearsal facilities for the band over the past few years has been around £3,300/annum. This has been based upon an exceptionally favourable hire rate, with no charge for use by the Youth Band and average usage of 2½ evenings per week.

Comparing current hire rates at other facilities, we estimate that our costs to hire a suitable facility, based upon our current usage would be at least £5,000/year. This is based on the lowest cost facilities in the area; however, we know that facilities in this price bracket (£15 – £20/hr) are block-booked for the evenings we would require them. Furthermore, this cost

does not include storage, which is unlikely to be available on site; commercial storage off site would add at least £1000/year plus insurance. Our hire costs will therefore increase to at least £6,000/year for current usage and would exceed £12,000/year if we increased our requirement to 4 evenings per week.

Conclusion

The Hitchin Band organisation needs suitable premises if it is going to continue to develop and thrive. We have already reached the point where weekly hire of rehearsal facilities is unlikely to be a viable option for much longer. We now aspire to further expand the organisation, particularly regarding development of our youth band, following a model which has been proven by several successful bands. For these reasons, we wish to secure a permanent home for the bands, which can also serve as an asset to the wider community. We can achieve this provided we can find and secure a suitable site or existing premises.

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For further information about Hitchin Band

go to www.hitchinband.co.uk or    search @hitchinband.co.uk