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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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| 12. | <u>COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER - HITCHIN BRIDGE CLUB</u> (Pages 3 - 6) |
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REPORT OF THE SENIOR ESTATES SURVEYOR

To enable the Hitchin Committee to comment on the report entitled Community Asset Transfer - Hitchin Bridge Club prior to consideration by Cabinet.

Please find attached two additional documents containing representations from the Hitchin Bridge Club.

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Community Asset Transfer – Hitchin Bridge Club

Firstly, a thank you to Chris Robson for attaching to his report all the documents the club submitted in support of this application. I hope they explain the purpose of the proposal and the value it offers to Hitchin and the district.

There was one omission to the suggested heads of agreement (8.2). The club have offered to draft an appropriate lease for NHDC's approval. It is appreciated that Council staff are under pressure at the moment and it was felt this could relieve them of a task and help progress the project.

Chris's report recognises the value to mental health and general wellbeing bridge offers to players and people who learn to play. Whilst it states that the older and younger age groups gain particular benefits which is correct it is also the case that people of every age profit from the mental workout, social contact, cooperative working, support, and friendship the game provides.

I would like to make a few comments on the officers' reports mainly for clarification purposes.

Proposed use by other community groups.

There is a conflict between the 4th and 6th paragraphs of 8.10. of Chris Robson's main report. One seems concerned that the bridge club would seek to attract groups from existing community facilities reducing their viability whilst the other wants to ensure that a lease commits the club to offer specific and defined provision to other groups.

Just to clarify our proposal is to build a clubhouse for the playing and teaching of bridge, not a new general community building. Whilst we would be happy for use by other groups when and where appropriate this is not in any way our primary objective.

Suggested alternatives to a new clubhouse.

There are several references in the officers reports to where the club previously met and suggestions as to possible future alternatives.

Bancroft Hall – this is where the club began, despite offering to take it over and rebuild it we had to vacate when that idea was rejected.

Our Lady's RC church hall – where we met before Covid19. The question has been raised as to why we don't use that 100% of the time. Short answer – we can't as it is used by the church and there are no extra slots available.

Other community centres – same problem, there is far too little availability. This shows active and widespread community use and local need hence the main reason we are proposing a new purpose built clubhouse.

Bancroft Bowls Pavilion, Ransoms Pavilion, Swinburne and Walsworth football pavilions – there is a suggestion that we could take over one of these. All would require considerable extension, there would be significant access issues, there would be a far greater impact and detrimental effect both on green space and neighbours and current users would have to be relocated. It was for this reason that we chose the Cadwell Lane site in preference to the land formerly occupied by the St John's pavilion which had been suggested as a possibility by officers.

Can I please ask you to compare the need for an area in which to play bridge with the requirements of many other sports? Cricket, hockey, football, and rugby need pitches, tennis needs courts, bowls need greens or indoor rinks. Bridge needs a large open indoor playing room. This is what we are offering to provide. A typical session of bridge is shown here. You will see the room is full.



Cadwell Lane Site.

We chose this area carefully in order to have a minimal effect on existing usage, the local area, and neighbours.

The Cadwell Lane GAP which has just expired commented that: -

There has been no community involvement with the site apart from the use by a local football club.

There have been incidents of fly tipping, antisocial behaviour, graffiti, and unauthorised use.

The main features of this area are the football pitch itself and the riverside walk along the Hiz. Our proposal does not affect these in anyway and I believe that our involvement in the area would bring new activity, interest, improvement, and investment to what is a relatively unknown and overlooked part of town.

Margaret Eddleston 20th February 2021

Life as a virtual bridge club. – a short update.

Due to Covid19 the Hitchin Bridge Club went entirely online in April 2020.

We now run 9 ordinary sessions online each week and a further 2 on a monthly basis some of which are open to non-members. This is nearly twice as much bridge as we could provide from the church hall because of the restricted availability there. The number of players participating each week has more than doubled which again confirms the unmet need.

The sessions cover all levels of experience from social and relaxed to the more competitive.

In addition, one of the club trustees continues to hold a supervised game for less confident members.

Hitchin was one of the first bridge clubs in Hertfordshire to embrace virtual bridge. It is the only online bridge club in North Herts and is the highest attended online club in Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, and Cambridgeshire.

In a typical week we have more than 480 players enjoying a game. (120 tables of bridge). This is not 480 different individuals as some play more than once each week but it usually at least 250 separate players.

We continue to hold a weekly session which is open at all bridge players. As well as providing an online platform for the smaller North Herts clubs (in particular Royston and Letchworth) players from Luton and Stevenage (which are also too small to move online) participate. All profit from this session is donated to the North Herts Hospice. Our donation at Christmas was £3800 and we anticipate being able to donate £600 per month whilst this pandemic lasts. Over 100 players support this session each week.

To keep members occupied we introduced an Isolation Corner section onto the club website. This features quizzes, trivia, jokes, interesting articles and facts, bridge tips, photographs, and messages. It helps members keep in touch with friends they cannot meet.

Unfortunately, the pandemic probably means that some of the smaller bridge clubs in the country and county, which generally meet only once a week in hired premises will close for good. It therefore becomes even more important to have a dedicated centrally based bridge hub serving all the district where players can get together, keep their brains active and their friendships buoyant.

There have been a couple of unexpected effects of going online.

1. Players have been able to join our sessions from all over the country and partner relatives, friends and former partners who have left the area. This has enabled members to keep in touch with people they have been unable to meet or visit during lockdown and has given them all a much needed boost.
2. A lot of members who are not currently playing online have chosen to renew their club membership for 2021 showing their appreciation that the club is more than just a place to play bridge but a caring and supportive community.

Margaret Eddleston 20th February 2021

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