

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

HITCHIN COMMITTEE

**MEETING HELD IN THE HITCHIN BOYS SCHOOL,
GRAMMAR SCHOOL WALK, HITCHIN
ON TUESDAY, 5TH DECEMBER, 2017 AT 7.30 PM**

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors Councillor Nicola Harris (Chairman), Councillor Ian Albert (Vice-Chairman), Judi Billing, Paul Clark, Elizabeth Dennis, Simon Harwood, Bernard Lovewell, Frank Radcliffe, Ray Shakespeare-Smith, Adrian Smith, Martin Stears-Handscomb and Richard Thake*

In Attendance:

David Miley (Democratic Services Manager), Andrew Mills (Service Manager - Grounds Maintenance), Claire Morgan (Communities Officer) and Hilary Dineen (Committee and Member Services Officer)

Also Present:

At the start of the meeting Councillor Clare Billing and 19 members of the public.

39 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Alan Millard.

Councillor Adrian Smith had advised that he may arrive late for the meeting.

40 MINUTES - 5 SEPTEMBER 2017

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 5 September 2017 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

41 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

No other business had been notified.

42 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

- (1) The Chairman thanked all who had attended Town Talk;
- (2) The Chairman welcomed all present at the meeting, particularly those who had attended to give a presentation;
- (3) The Chairman informed those present that, in accordance with Council Policy the meeting would be audio recorded;
- (4) The Chairman drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.

43 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - HERTS AND ESSEX AMBULANCE SERVICE

Ms Aderyn Gillett, Herts and Essex Ambulance Service, thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a verbal presentation regarding their grant application.

Ms Gillett informed Members that the application for grant funding was to enable a public access defibrillator to be placed outside of the Herts and Essex Ambulance Station shop in Churchgate, Hitchin.

There were 8 defibrillators in Hitchin of which 2 were public access for 24 hours a day.

The proposed defibrillator would be 24 hour public access, which could be used before the first responders arrived and would enhance the first responder projects.

The defibrillator would be deployed following the instigation of a 999 call and would enable the commencement of CPR when needed, prior to the arrival of first responders. This would cover a 500 – 800 metre area around Churchgate, which was in a busy area of town and had a very busy nightlife.

Members queried who would maintain the defibrillator, what training would need to be provided to enable use and whether it would be insured against any damages caused

Ms Gillett advised that the aim of the project was to place a defibrillator outside of every building in Hertfordshire that they had a presence in. The costs associated with maintenance, such as replacement batteries and paddles over a 10 year period had been factored into their budget.

Any equipment provided would be insured and be able to be replaced within 24 hours. The equipment was designed so that it could be used by anyone, with verbal instructions being supplied by the machine.

The Charity would also wish to provide public awareness sessions, in order to make people less wary of using the equipment.

Members asked for clarification regarding the charity status of the organisation and the links that they had with the NHS.

Ms Gillett explained that this was a charity and was not part of the NHS. The NHS provided critical care staff such as paramedics, who were seconded onto the aircraft, but did not provide any direct funding. The Charity covered the costs of the Consultant/Registrar grade Doctors and raised all funds via fundraising initiatives.

Members asked how many defibrillators were placed around the Town Centre and how many were needed.

The Communities Officer advised that there were currently 9 defibrillators in the Town, although most of these were in doctors or dentists surgeries and were not available 24 hours a day, whereas this would be 24 hours public access.

The Chairman thanked Ms Gillett for her presentation.

44 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - HITCHIN HACKSPACE

Mr Mark Mellors, Hitchin Hackspace, thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a verbal presentation regarding their grant application.

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Mr Mellors explained that Hitchin Hackspace was requesting grant funding of £8,000 to help kick-start the fit out of the disused toilet block at Bancroft.

Hitchin Hackspace was a group of about 29 enthusiasts and makers who make and repair things for themselves and the local community, who had so far met on a weekly basis at Ransoms Rec.

He had previously made a presentation to this Committee asking for support to take on this building and was please to report that they now had a lease on the building and were starting the renovation work required.

Much of the labour intensive work, which could be undertaken by members, had been started such as removal of plant life and removal of the cubicles.

They had now reached a point in the work where they needed professional input such as electricians and needed to purchase items to enable the fit out of the building. They had estimated the total costs of renovation and fit out to be £40,000.

They had applied to several community funds to help with the costs of fit out and were using some of their savings. They did have income from membership fees, but these would be used to cover running costs.

Any grant funding received would enable the project to get off the ground quicker.

Members asked for details of outreach work undertaken by Hitchin Hackspace and queried what would happen regarding the murals on the side of the building.

Mr Mellors advised that it was hoped that this facility would be an asset that could be used by schools and groups. Many people had been a part of Hackspace and learnt skills that had then enabled them to start up their own business. In respect of the murals, no discussions had yet taken place.

In response to queries from Members Mr Mellors confirmed that they were in receipt of heavily discounted rate relief and that the majority of the benefit of this project was for Hitchin groups and residents.

Members suggested that they consider requesting grant funding from other Area Committees as well as their County Councillors.

The Chairman thanked Mr Mellors for his presentation.

45 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - HITCHIN INTERFAITH FORUM

Mr Rodney Hampson, Hitchin Interfaith Forum, thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a verbal presentation regarding their grant application.

Mr Hampson informed Members that the Interfaith Forum was started a number of years ago as a Christian Forum, but had taken the decision to welcome all faiths.

The group had a minimal turnover, with the only expenditure being the rental of hall space for meetings.

The Forum was working to bring different faiths together and work with the Police on reducing hate crime.

Christine, a representative of the Quakers advised that, in response to the 100th anniversary of the end of World War 1, the Friends Meeting House undertook a project about peace, which had resulted in the transformation of the burial ground into a peace garden, which included a pond in the shape of a dove, some plaques about conscientious objection and some benches.

The Interfaith Forum had suggested that addition of multi coloured benches to demonstrate peace between diverse religions and cultures.

The Peace Garden was open to all and provided a place where people could visit and reflect on peace and unity.

Members asked whether other monies would be raised toward this project, how many people engaged with the Interfaith Forum and who would be able to use the proposed benches.

Mr Hampson advised that donations were being received toward this project and that the benches and Peace Garden was open for anyone to use and not restricted in any way.

The Chairman thanked Mr Hampson and Christine for their presentation.

46 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - HITCHIN HEDGEHOG CARE

Mrs Alison Taylor, Hitchin Hedgehog Care, thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a verbal presentation regarding their grant application.

Mrs Taylor advised that Hitchin Hedgehog Care was a very small local charity that took in sick hedgehogs, nursed them back to health and re-released them into the wild.

The Charity was started in 2008 and recently had put in place Trustees and a constitution so that they could become an HMRC registered charity.

The main expense was the cost of vet's bills, which could just be covered from monies raised. However fundraising did not raise enough money to make special purchases that would significantly increase the survival rates such as an incubator, suction machine and nebulizer.

Hedgehogs were in decline in this country and therefore the charity accepted hedgehogs from anyone bringing them in and attempted to release them back into the area where they were found.

Members noted that there was a large charity (British Hedgehog Preservation Society) that offered support to hedgehogs and queried why they were not part of the larger charity.

Mrs Taylor advised that the larger charity did research and kept records of charities such as hers that gave practical support, but they did not offer any funding toward the care of hedgehogs.

Members asked what was causing the declining in hedgehog numbers.

Mrs Taylor informed Members that the number of hedgehogs in the UK had reduced from 30 million in 1930 to 1 million now, The decline could be attributed to a loss of habitat through the removal of hedgerows, people gardens being kept too tidy and being walled in by fencing and the use of pesticides amongst other problems faced by hedgehogs in the modern world.

They were currently able to take in 16 hedgehogs at any one time and last year helped about 60 hedgehogs in total.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Taylor for her presentation.

47 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - HITCHIN STROKE GROUP

Patricia and Ken, Hitchin Stroke Group, thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a verbal presentation regarding their grant application.

Patricia advised that the registered speaker, Carol Galloway, had offered her apologies and that she would be speaking on her behalf.

The Hitchin Stroke Group met one afternoon each week during term time for two hours.

It started at the Lister Hospital in 1990 as a group for people to share their experiences.

The group provided an important meeting place where people could communicate in a safe environment, where their difficulties were understood. It also provided carers with a couple of hours respite.

They were applying for grant funding to help cover the costs of venue hire and transportation costs.

Funding was essential to enable the group to continue to support this vulnerable and disadvantaged section of society.

Ken informed Members that he was pleased to speak on behalf of the users of the Stroke group.

A Stroke could hit anyone at any time and change a life in an instant.

The Lister Hospital gave great support, but this was time limited.

The Stroke Group allowed people to speak to other people with differing symptoms following a stroke and enabled people to communicate without fear or judgment.

Members asked how members generally got to the Stroke Group and how many attended on a regular basis.

Patricia advised that members travelled either by car or by Helping Hands, which the group paid for. There were currently 7 members, it would be difficult to manage more as each member required individual attention. Currently there were just 3 volunteer helpers.

The Chairman thanked Patricia and Ken for their presentation.

48 GRANTS AND COMMUNITY UPDATE

The Communities Officer presented the report entitled Grants and Community Update and drew attention to the following:

Hitchin Town Hall Bench

This Committee had funded the renovation of the bench, which had now been completed and put in place.

Grant Funding

All awards of grant funding would be paid from the 2016/17 carry over budget

Highways Liaison Meetings

Members expressed concern that there had been no Highways Liaison meetings since October 2016.

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The Committee and Member Services Officer advised that a meeting had been arranged for 1 March 2018 and a notice of this would be sent to all Members as soon as possible.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the budgetary expenditure, balances and carry forwards from the Development Ward Budgets as set out in Appendix A – Hitchin Area Committee Budget for 2017/18 be noted;
- (2) That the Committee endorses the actions taken by the Community Officer to promote greater community capacity and well-being for Hitchin;

REASON FOR DECISION: To keep Members of the Committee apprised of the latest developments in community activities in Hitchin.

49 GRANT APPLICATION - HERTS AND ESSEX AMBULANCE SERVICE

RESOLVED: That grant funding of £650 be awarded to the Herts and Essex Ambulance Service from the 2016/17 Discretionary Budget towards the cost of purchase and installation of a defibrillator attached to their charity shop in Churchgate.

REASON FOR DECISION: To improve services provided by local organisations and groups which are accessed by the community.

50 GRANT APPLICATION - HITCHIN HACKSPACE

RESOLVED: That grant funding of £5,000 be awarded to the Hitchin Hackspace from the 2016/17 Discretionary Budget towards the cost of renovating the former Bancroft toilet block.

REASON FOR DECISION: To improve services provided by local organisations and groups which are accessed by the community.

51 GRANT APPLICATION - HITCHIN INTERFAITH FORUM

Members were pleased to support a project aimed at promoting peace and unity

RESOLVED: That grant funding of £984 be awarded to Hitchin Interfaith Forum from the 2016/17 Discretionary Budget towards the cost of purchase and installation of a picnic table bench in the Peace Garden at the Hitchin Friends Meeting House.

REASON FOR DECISION: To improve services provided by local organisations and groups which are accessed by the community.

52 GRANT APPLICATION - HITCHIN HEDGEHOG CARE

RESOLVED: That grant funding of £592 be awarded to Hitchin Hedgehog Care from the 2016/17 Discretionary Budget towards the cost of specialist equipment needed to care for sick hedgehogs to enable their release back to the wild.

REASON FOR DECISION: To improve services provided by local organisations and groups which are accessed by the community.

53 GRANT APPLICATION - HITCHIN STROKE GROUP

Members were concerned that, under the current grant rules, this group would not be able to request funding for two years and therefore it was proposed and seconded that £2,000 be awarded to cover transports and venue hire for a two year period.

RESOLVED: That grant funding of £2,000 be awarded to Hitchin Stroke Group from the 2016/17 Discretionary Budget towards the cost of transport and venue hire for the next two years.

REASON FOR DECISION: To improve services provided by local organisations and groups which are accessed by the community.

54 UPDATE REGARDING THE ONGOING MAINTENANCE OF AREAS OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPORTANCE

The Service Manager – Grounds Maintenance presented the report entitled update regarding the on-going maintenance of areas of environmental importance.

He explained that the aim was to agree the action plans regarding Oughtonhead Common, Purwell Meadows and Burymead Springs and to provide an update regarding progress against delivery of the management plans for Walsworth Common, Cadwell Lane and St John's Cemetery.

In respect of Burymead Springs, the development of the rail curve had meant that the site had been unavailable for a number of years. The Management Plan agreed with Network Rail to provide planting, replacement hedging etc. had now been completed and the site had been handed back to NHDC to manage.

The Action Plan being considered now was only the second for this area and aimed to move forward by managing the ecology in the area.

Walsworth Common had recently had a launch event regarding the signage at the site and the redevelopment of the pond, which had been part funded by the Tesco Bags for Life grant funding scheme.

Securing of external grant funding was key to delivery of the action plans at all of the sites.

The Team had been trialling different management regimes for the management of St John's Cemetery, which had attracted a lot of interest. The Cemetery now had a fabulous Friends of Groups who worked in the cemetery on most Fridays.

All sites were monitored by the Countryside Management Service, who keep an eye on and encourage the work undertaken by the volunteer groups.

In all cases they undertook a full and comprehensive consultation with local residents who have the opportunity to give feedback, which was then fed into the management plan.

Members questioned why the area of Windmill Hill was not included in the report

The Service Manager – Grounds Maintenance advised that both the Dell and Windmill Hill were classified as open space rather than a nature reserve. He clarified that these areas had very little ecological value. Both areas were key open spaces for the Town Centre and were managed as such, although he was open to any suggestions regarding these sites.

He advised that he was aware of the proposals for the future of the Dell and would not wish to pre-empt any initiatives for the area by investing in the area prematurely.

Windmill Hill currently had a public art installation, which had been sponsored by Hitchin Initiative.

Members were appreciative of the work undertaken by the Grounds Team in maintaining and enhancing the open areas and areas of environmental importance.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the evolution of the Management Plans for the next five years as they relate to Oughtonhead Common, Purwell Meadows and Burymead Springs be noted;
- (2) That the Action Plans for Oughtonhead Common, Purwell Meadows and Burymead Springs be supported;
- (3) That the progress achieved to deliver the Management Plans for Walsworth Common, Cadwell Lane and St John's Cemetery be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To keep the Hitchin Committee apprised of the progress made against the management and action plans for the areas of environmental importance in and around Hitchin.

55 INFORMATION NOTE - GREEN SPACE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Committee received an information note regarding the Green Space Management Strategy.

Members noted the attempts made by Officers to get people to take on the play areas, but expressed concern that there had been no recognition of the discussions and decisions made on 5 September 2017 (Minute 35) including that Councillors Harwood and Stears-Handscomb had investigated alternative funding methods and had made a presentation to Cabinet. They requested that Officers investigate and take forward the ideas and suggestions from this Minute and that of the relevant Cabinet meeting.

Members noted that there had been an expression of interest regarding Cadwell Lane and queried why this had not been taken forward.

The Service Manager – Grounds Maintenance advised that the group considering Cadwell Lane felt that the costs were too high and withdrew. This was also the case for the St Johns Pavilion.

RESOLVED: That the Parks and Countryside Development Manager be requested to investigate and take forward the ideas and suggestions made at the meeting held on 5 September 2017 (Minute 35 refers) and that of the relevant Cabinet meeting.

REASON FOR DECISION: To progress, wherever possible, the running of local play areas by local groups.

56 THE BID RENEWAL PROCESS

Prior to the item being discussed Councillor Judi Billing declared a declarable interest as she was a Director of Hitchin Initiative.

The Democratic Service Manager gave a verbal presentation regarding the BID renewal process.

He explained that the Business Improvement District was defined and mapped by the BID organisation to ensure that everyone knew what area was included within and therefore would benefit from the BID.

Once the geographical area had been determined this was submitted to the Local Authority for approval together with a business plan. The key focus for the Local Authority was to ensure that consultation regarding the process had been undertaken and that there was/would be good financial arrangements in place for management of the BID.

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Once satisfied the Ballot Holder, usually the Returning Officer, undertook a ballot of the businesses in the defined area.

If approved BIDs would receive a levy, collected as an additional payment of business rates and for this had to provide additional services that benefitted the businesses. The sorts of things that the Hitchin BID had provided in the past included the Ranger Team, Christmas Lights and seasonal floral displays.

NHDC took a lot of care to identify those eligible to cast a vote in the ballot and they currently chose to absorb the costs of undertaking the ballot and collecting the business rate levy.

Members asked whether a cost benefit analysis had been undertaken regarding BIDS and the benefits they provide for the whole Community.

The Democratic Services Manager advised that the services provided by the BID must be in addition to any normally provided by the Local Authority.

In response to questions the Democratic Services Manager confirmed that Charities within the BID area were excluded and that Cabinet's role in the BID process was to agree the business plan of the BID and to decide how to vote in respect of any NHDC hereditaments.

Members acknowledged the excellent work undertaken by the BID and expressed their thanks to the BID organisation

The Chairman thanked the Democratic Services Manager for his presentation regarding the BID process.

57 HITCHIN TOWN CENTRE MANAGER

Mr Keith Hoskins, Hitchin Town Centre Manager, thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a verbal presentation regarding the issues and activities in Hitchin Town Centre and drew attention to the following:

Renewal BID Ballot

The renewal of the BID was due in 2018 and this would be pursued.

The BID was extremely grateful to NHDC for holding the BID ballots and collecting the BID levy free of charge.

The benefits and advantages of the BID could be seen around the Town.

Members asked whether the potential increase in the levels and timing of car parking charges would have an effect on the success of the BID renewal.

Mr Hoskins advised that car parking charges would have no effect on the success of the BID.

Parking

Mr Hoskins advised that, if the BID were responsible for car parking in the town, they would charge a flat fee, but would ensure that any revenue was ring-fenced for use in Hitchin.

It should not be necessary to beg for funding for projects, considering the level of income raised by car parking in the town.

Shops

Paperchase and an art gallery in Hermitage Road would be opening

Sadly Hawkins would be closing its doors after 154 years in business.

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Work was being undertaken to make arrangements for the retention school uniform sales in the Town Centre, two companies had expressed interest.

Work was actively being undertaken to relocate the dry-cleaning franchise currently within Hawkins.

Cycle Racks

Cycle racks would make reappearance in Market Square in the next financial year.

Christmas Lights

The connection of the Christmas Lights had been difficult with Ringway causing problems this year.

Members were concerned about the problems caused by Ringway.

Fountain

The fountain in the Town Centre had been paid for by a benefactor. This has not worked efficiently for some.

If problems can be solved regarding the placement of this fountain, the previous benefactor would be willing to fund a replacement fountain or an upgrade to enable it to work efficiently.

Filming

There had been a lot of filming in Hitchin Town Centre and it was queried how much money was made from filming in the Town and how and where this money was spent.

The Dell

Members asked whether there had been any progress regarding the Dell

Mr Hoskins advised that progress was extremely slow. They were currently awaiting written confirmation from the family that they agree to the proposals at the Dell.

He would start chasing this after Christmas.

Retirement

Members acknowledged that Mr Hoskins would be retiring from the day to day running of the BID and Town Centre. They wished to place on record the Committee's thanks for his many years hard work for the town and their good wishes for the future.

The Chairman thanked Mr Hoskins for his presentation.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Hitchin Committee places on record thanks to Mr Keith Hoskins, Hitchin BID and Town Centre Manager, for his many years hard work for the Town and their good wishes for the future;
- (2) That the Head of Finance, Performance and Asset Management be requested to advise this Committee how much NHDC earns from filming in Hitchin and how that money is spent;
- (3) That the Head of Finance, Performance and Asset Management be requested to give advice regarding the placement and efficiency of the fountain in Hitchin Town Centre.

REASON FOR DECISION: To inform the Hitchin Committee about the amount of money earned from filming in Hitchin and how that money is spent.

58 WARD MATTERS AND OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS - MEMBERS' REPORTS

No Ward or Outside Organisation issues were discussed.

59 ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION AT FUTURE MEETINGS

Members expressed concern that car parking spaces in Hitchin were being used by film companies and particularly identified the use of Woodside Car Park as a problem.

Members suggested that the Industrial Link Road and the Dell be added to the subjects for discussion at future meeting of this Committee.

RESOLVED: That the following subjects be considered at a future meeting of this Committee:

- (i) Car Parking in Hitchin;
- (ii) Stotfold Road – Industrial Area Link Road;
- (iii) The Dell

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Hitchin Committee to discuss issues and subjects that affect the local area.

Audio Recording of Meeting

The meeting closed at 9.20 pm

Chairman