

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL



19 February 2021

Our Ref Hitchin Committee - 02.03.2021
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To: Members of the Committee: Councillor Ian Albert (Chair), Councillor Clare Billing (Vice-Chair), Councillor Judi Billing MBE, Councillor Val Bryant, Councillor Paul Clark, Councillor Sam Collins, Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, Councillor Simon Harwood, Councillor Keith Hoskins MBE, Councillor Mike Hughson, Councillor Martin Stears-Handscorn, Councillor Kay Tart and Councillor Richard Thake.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN OF A

MEETING OF THE HITCHIN COMMITTEE

to be held as

A VIRTUAL MEETING

On

TUESDAY, 2ND MARCH, 2021 AT 7.30 PM

Yours sincerely,

Jeanette Thompson
Service Director – Legal and Community

****MEMBERS PLEASE ENSURE THAT YOU DOWNLOAD ALL AGENDAS AND REPORTS VIA THE MOD.GOV APPLICATION ON YOUR TABLET BEFORE ATTENDING THE MEETING****

Agenda Part I

Item	Page
1. WELCOME AND REMOTE/PARTLY REMOTE MEETINGS PROTOCOL SUMMARY Members are requested to ensure that they are familiar with the attached summary of the Remote/Partly Remote Meetings Protocol. The full Remote/Partly Remote Meetings Protocol has been published and is available here: https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/council-and-democracy/council-and-committee-meetings .	(Pages 5 - 6)
2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE	
3. MINUTES - 10 MARCH 2020 TO 1 DECEMBER 2020 To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on: 10 March 2020; 30 June 2020; 29 September 2020; 1 December 2020.	(Pages 7 - 46)
4. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS Members should notify the Chair of other business which they wish to be discussed at the end of either Part I or Part II business set out in the agenda. They must state the circumstances which they consider justify the business being considered as a matter of urgency. The Chair will decide whether any item(s) raised will be considered.	
5. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS Members are reminded that any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda, should be declared as either a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or Declarable Interest and are required to notify the Chair of the nature of any interest declared at the commencement of the relevant item on the agenda. Members declaring a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest must withdraw from the meeting for the duration of the item. Members declaring a Declarable Interest, wishing to exercise a 'Councillor Speaking Right', must declare this at the same time as the interest, move to the public area before speaking to the item and then must leave the room before the debate and vote.	
6. MESSAGE FROM THOMAS FESER - LORD MAYOR OF BINGEN AM RHEIN To receive and view a video message from Thomas Feser, Lord Mayor of the	

City of Bingen am Rhein twinned with Hitchin.

7. HERTFORDSHIRE CONSTABULARY

To receive the annual update from the Hertfordshire Constabulary on their work in the Hitchin area.

8. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

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.

9. HITCHIN BID MANAGER

To receive a verbal presentation from the Hitchin BID Manager.

10. CITIZENS ADVICE NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE - PROVISION OF SERVICES IN HITCHIN

To discuss the provision of services in Hitchin by Citizens Advice North Hertfordshire with Rosie Waters, CEO.

11. DISCUSSION ITEM - CHARNWOOD HOUSE

To discuss options for the future use of Charnwood House.

12. COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER - HITCHIN BRIDGE CLUB REPORT OF THE SENIOR ESTATES SURVEYOR

(Pages
47 - 102)

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

13. GRANTS & COMMUNITY UPDATE REPORT OF THE POLICY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MANAGER

(Pages
103 -
112)

To update the Committee on the activities and actions of the Communities Officer, to advise on the current expenditure and balances of the delegated budgets and to consider applications for grant funding.

14. WARD MATTERS AND OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS - MEMBERS' REPORTS

To receive any verbal reports from Members regarding Ward matters and Outside Organisations.

15. POSSIBLE AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

The Chair to lead a discussion regarding possible agenda items for future meetings including:

- Arts & Culture in Hitchin
- Mental Health Provision
- Food Provision Network
- Fair Trade Town status
- Air Quality
- Local Equality & Diversity initiatives
- Business Vacancies & Unemployment in Hitchin post-COVID

REMOTE/PARTLY REMOTE MEETINGS PROTOCOL SUMMARY

A protocol regarding remote meetings has been devised as a result of The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 No.392 ('the Regulations') to provide guidance for the conduct of any remote meeting of the Council, and its various Committees and Sub-Committees, held under the provisions of the Regulations and subsequent changes to the Constitution.

The full Remote / Partly Remote Meetings Protocol has been published and is available to view on the Council's website via the following link: <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/council-and-democracy/council-and-committee-meetings>

The Council's adopted Constitution will continue to apply to meetings of the Council and its various Committees and Sub-Committees. Where there is a conflict between the protocol and Constitution the Constitution takes precedence.

The protocol applies to this meeting. It outlines processes for conducting remote meetings. Some key points are highlighted here for guidance:

- Prior to the start of a meeting the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer/Manager ('The Officer') will confirm the meeting is being streamed live. They will confirm that they can see and hear all participating Members, Officers and/or members of the public at the start or upon reconvening a meeting.
- Any person attending the meeting remotely should join no later than 15 minutes prior to allow for technical checks. They should ensure that their name on screen appears in the agreed format, as indicated in the Protocol. They should mute their microphone when not speaking. Their background should be nondescript or virtual/blurred if possible. Headsets are recommended to reduce audio feedback.
- Remember to stay in view of the camera. While on camera everything you do is visible; please observe as far as possible the etiquette you would as if attending a meeting in person.
- Be careful to prevent exempt or confidential papers being seen within the video-feed. When a meeting is in private session there should be only those entitled to be present in the room. The live stream will continue with a holding card displayed.
- If a Member wishes to speak, they should use the raise hand function. Please wait to be invited by the Chair to address the meeting. The normal procedure rules with respect to debate and speaking times will apply as per the Constitution.
- If a Member has declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest and is required to leave the meeting during the consideration of an item, they will be placed in the waiting room. It is the responsibility of the Member in question to remind the Chair at the start of such item. The Officer will remind the Chair to return the Member as appropriate.
- Members will need to use the tools in the "Participants" function to vote: using a green tick to indicate 'for', a red cross to indicate 'against', or the "raise hand" tool to indicate an abstention. Where a Member has had to dial into the meeting by telephone, the Chair will ask for verbal confirmation as to how they wish to vote. Leave the vote in situ until told otherwise by either the Chair or Officer.
- The Officer will clearly state the result of the vote and the Chair will then move on.
- Details of how Members voted will not be kept or minuted unless a Recorded Vote is requested or an individual requests that their vote be recorded, although voting may be seen and/or heard on the video recording.
- If there are Part 2 (confidential) items Members will be invited to join a breakout room for these items. You must accept this invitation.
- Once Part 2 (confidential) discussions have concluded Members will need to leave the breakout room. Please do not leave the meeting.

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Agenda Item 3

The following Minutes are attached for the Hitchin Committee to consider and approve:

10 March 2020;

30 June 2020;

29 September 2020;

1 December 2020.

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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

HITCHIN COMMITTEE

**MEETING HELD IN THE WESTMILL COMMUNITY CENTRE, JOHN BARKER PLACE,
HITCHIN SG5 2PG
ON TUESDAY, 10TH MARCH, 2020 AT 7.30 PM**

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Ian Albert (Chair), Judi Billing, Val Bryant, Sam Collins, Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, Simon Harwood, Mike Hughson, Martin Stears-Handscomb and Richard Thake*

In Attendance: *Shayne Crowe (Environmental Protection and Housing Manager), Katie Staddon (Assistant Community Engagement Officer) and Matthew Hepburn (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer)*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting approximately 10 members of the public.*

63 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio Recording – 20 Seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: Paul Clark, Keith Hoskins, Clare Billing and Kay Tart.

64 MINUTES - 14 JANUARY 2020

Audio Recording – 1 Minute 6 Seconds

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 14 January 2020 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

65 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio Recording – 1 Minute 25 Seconds

There was no other business notified.

66 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 1 Minute 28 Seconds

- (1) The Chair welcomed those present at the meeting, especially those who had attended to give a presentation;
- (2) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded;
- (3) The Chair 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.

67 HERTFORDSHIRE CONSTABULARY

Audio Recording – 2 Minutes 40 Seconds

Sergeant Jon Vine, Hertfordshire Constabulary, provided Members of the Committee with an update on crime and police matters in the Hitchin area. The following information was provided:

Burglaries:

- Burglary reduction initiatives introduced;
- There were good results in tackling burglaries;
- There had been a reduction in rural burglaries;
- Victims of burglaries were visited and supported by Officers;

Speeding:

- 20mph limit had been introduced on Bearton Road;

Anti-Social Behaviour:

- Drug dealing had taken place at the Lairage Multi-Storey Car Park;
- There had been several arrests made in connection to Anti-Social Behaviour at the Lairage Multi-Storey car park;

Town Centre:

- There was no major concern with the night time economy;
- The police reported that Community Protection Notices had been issued to those committing the offence of begging;

Other Issues:

- County Lines were emerging. However, this was not currently an issue in Hitchin;
- Motor vehicle crime had increased particularly an increase in the theft of catalytic converters.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Judi Billing;
- Councillor Ian Albert;
- Councillor Simon Harwood;
- Councillor Val Bryant;
- Councillor Richard Thake; and
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg.

In response to questions raised by Members, Sergeant Jon Vine responded as follows:

- Better trained door staff and changes in drinking culture had improved the night time economy;
- Anti-Social Parking was an issue outside schools. The Police and North Hertfordshire District Council Enforcement Officers were working with schools to tackle this problem. However, schools needed to work with parents to resolve this issue as well as the Police had limited resources available to tackling parking issues outside schools;
- Ring door bells and internal cameras helped to protect homes from burglaries; and
- The right measures were in place to deal with Domestic Violence in a positive way and there were lots of resources put into the Domestic Violence Unit in Hatfield which Members could visit, if they so wished. He advised that this could be arranged via the Community Protection Manager at North Hertfordshire District Council.

The Chair, Councillor Ian Albert, thanked Sergeant Jon Vine for his presentation and for the work of Hertfordshire Constabulary.

68 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - FEED UP WARM UP

Audio Recording – 35 Minutes 14 Seconds

Mr Shane Cole thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a verbal presentation regarding their grant application, as follows:

- Feed Up Warm Up was now a registered charity;
- Sleep pods had been distributed across Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire;
- The sleep pods were positioned in areas with CCTV;
- Drop-ins to the service had increased by 70%;
- There were approximately 30-40 clients attending the service on a Wednesday;
- Owing to the increase in clients, resources were disappearing;
- The grant money requested at tonight's meeting would be used towards the cost of publicity materials and staff uniforms;
- There had been an increase in street homelessness;
- There had been an increase in female clients seeking help from Feed Up Warm Up, sometimes as a result of them fleeing domestic violence; and
- Extra funding would allow Feed up Warm Up to increase patrols, maintain their vehicles and train more volunteers in areas such as mental health awareness, safeguarding and self-defence.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Sam Collins; and
- Councillor Judi Billing.

In response to questions raised by Members, Mr Cole responded as follows:

- Volunteers currently required to pay for their uniform themselves; and
- Businesses have been approached to ask for help with uniform sponsorship.

Councillors Judi Billing and Richard Thake both advised Mr Cole that as Hertfordshire County Councillors, they have access to Locality Budgets that could also be used to help fund his project.

The Chair, Councillor Ian Albert, thanked Mr Cole for his presentation.

69 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - CLIMB HITCHIN

Audio Recording – 47 Minutes 50 Seconds

Ms Hannah Morgan-Gray and Mr Rob Findon thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a verbal presentation regarding their grant application as follows:

- Climb Hitchin was created as a result of the lack of climbing facilities in the local area and a demand for it;
- The club was open to the whole community in order to teach people the technical skills required to climb safely;
- The grant requested would be used to train 6 new volunteer climbing wall instructors; and
- At present, 90% of users were Hitchin residents.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Richard Thake;
- Councillor Judi Billing; and
- Councillor Val Bryant.

In response to questions raised by Members, Ms Morgan-Gray and Mr Findon responded as follows:

- There was capacity to hold additional sessions;
- Climb Hitchin was an adult-only club at present as teaching children carried a greater risk. However, offering family climbing sessions may be considered in the future;
- The youngest climber was aged 18 years old and the oldest was 76 years old; and
- The climb attracted a mix of people – half of the instructors were female.

The Chair, Councillor Ian Albert, thanked Ms Morgan-Gray and Mr Findon for their presentation.

70 HITCHIN BID MANAGER

Audio recording – 35 Minutes

There was no Hitchin BID update provided at that Committee as Mr Tom Hardy, Hitchin BID Manager, had sent his apologies for absence due to being unwell.

71 INFORMATION NOTE: PLANNING OBLIGATIONS

Audio Recording – 1 Hour 21 Minutes 54 Seconds

The Chair introduced the information note entitled Planning Obligations and advised Members that the report was for noting.

The following Members asked questions or commented:

- Councillor Sam Collins;
- Councillor Simon Harwood; and
- Councillor Richard Thake.

In response to questions and comments raised by Members, Councillor Ian Albert responded as follows:

- The information note had been requested at the Hitchin Committee in October 2019 when the Development and Conservation Manager attended to provide an annual update on S106 obligations; and
- The information note was intended to respond to the question relating to what s106 money had been allocated to Hitchin Town Hall and museum projects.

RESOLVED: That the information note entitled Planning Obligations be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To inform Members of all agreed S106 funds that were allocated to the Hitchin Town Hall project over recent years.

72 AIR QUALITY UPDATE

Audio Recording – 1 Hour 1 Minute 30 Seconds

The Environmental Protection and Housing Manager provided the Committee with an Air Quality Update, as follows:

- Defra required a report on an annual basis regarding air quality which would be submitted at the end of June;
- The results would be received in April and would need adjusting;
- NOx levels have reduced and not exceeded national air quality limits;
- The report results could be re-presented in September;
- The results would be published on the Environmental Health section of the North Hertfordshire District Council website;
- In order to improve air quality, work was being done with other local authorities and planning officers; and
- The air pollution alert system enabled people to sign up to receive a text or email alert when levels of air pollution increased;

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Sam Collins;
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg;
- Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb;
- Councillor Simon Harwood;
- Councillor Richard Thake; and
- Councillor Ian Albert.

The Environmental Protection and Housing Manager responded to Members questions accordingly.

73 INFORMATION NOTE: NHDC TRANSPORT PROJECTS UPDATE

Audio Recording – 1 Hour 25 Minutes

The Chair introduced the information note entitled NHDC Transport Projects Update and lead a discussion on the Town Talk that had taken place prior to the Hitchin Committee which had been transport themed.

The following Members took part in discussions:

- Councillor Judi Billing;
- Councillor Sam Collins;
- Councillor Martin Stears-Handscorn;
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg;
- Councillor Simon Harwood; and
- Councillor Richard Thake.

Feedback provided by Members was as follows:

- Extending the town talk duration;
- Holding more themed/specialist town talks as well as maintaining the more general town talks;
- Ensuring members of the public were able to engage as much as possible and play an active role at the town talk; and
- The ability for the public to submit questions electronically before the town talk.

RESOLVED: That the information note entitled NHDC Transport Projects Update be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To provide Councillor's with an update on the current transport projects that the Council is currently involved with.

74 GRANTS & COMMUNITY UPDATE

Audio Recording – 1 Hour 36 Minutes

The Assistant Community Engagement Officer presented the Grants and Community Update report and advised the following:

- On 6 February 2020, a Westmill Network meeting took place with other agencies in order to facilitate a joint approach to combatting Anti-Social Behaviour around Westmill;
- Herts Sports Partnership were offering free football sessions every Thursday starting on 19 March 2020 at Westmill Community Centre from 7pm – 8pm;
- 'Waste not want less' event would be taking place on Saturday 4 April 2020 from 10am – 4pm at Hitchin Town Hall;
- There was a good response to the 'Have your say' events that took place on Friday 6 and Saturday 7 March 2020. Members of the public were asked questions around their hope and aspirations for the town, the Hitchin Market, transport and green spaces; and
- The Hitchin BID Manger would be putting forward a grant application for Hitchin Pride.

RESOLVED: That the actions taken by the Community Engagement officer to promote greater community capacity and well-being for Hitchin be endorsed.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

- (1) To ensure the Committee is kept informed of the work of the Community Engagement Team;
- (2) This report is intended to inform Members of the financial resources available to the Committee. It draws attention to the current budgetary situation by assisting in the effective financial management of the Area Committee's budget. This ensures that all actions are performed in line with the Authority's Financial Regulations, the Council's Constitution, and the guidance of the existing Grants policy as agreed by Cabinet in June 2016;
- (3) The awarding of financial assistance to voluntary organisations and the use of discretionary spending allows the Committee to further the aims of the Corporate Plan.

75 GRANT APPLICATION - FEED UP WARM UP

Audio recording – 1 Hour

RESOLVED: That grant funding of £676 be awarded to Feed Up Warm Up to assist with the cost of publicity materials and staff uniforms.

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

76 GRANT APPLICATION - CLIMB HITCHIN

Audio recording – 1 Hour

RESOLVED: That grant funding of £350 be awarded to Climb Hitchin to assist with the cost of training 6 new volunteer climbing wall instructors.

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

77 WARD MATTERS AND OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS - MEMBERS' REPORTS

Audio recording – 1 Hour 42 Minutes 35 Seconds

There were no ward matters.

78 POSSIBLE AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Audio recording – 1 Hour 43 Minutes

The Chair requested that, should any Members have any suggestions for agenda items for future meetings, they advise himself, officers or the Committee Clerk.

The meeting closed at 9.23 pm

Chair

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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

HITCHIN COMMITTEE

**MEETING HELD IN THE THIS WILL BE A VIRTUAL MEETING
ON TUESDAY, 30TH JUNE, 2020 AT 7.30 PM**

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Ian Albert, Clare Billing, Judi Billing, Val Bryant, Paul Clark, Sam Collins, Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, Simon Harwood, Keith Hoskins, Mike Hughson, Martin Stears-Handscorn, Kay Tart and Richard Thake*

In Attendance: *Bim Afolami (MP), Tom Hardy (Hitchin BID Manager). Simon Ellis (Development and Conservation Manager), Katie Staddon (Assistant Community Engagement Officer) and Hilary Dineen (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager).*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting County Councillor Derrick Ashley and 2 members of the public, including registered speakers.*

1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Audio Recording – 24 seconds

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager welcomed everyone to this virtual Hitchin Committee that was being conducted with Members and Officers at various locations, communicating via audio/video and online.

She then gave guidance as follows:

Attendance

A roll call was undertaken to ensure that all Members and Officers could hear and be heard.

Live Streaming

The meeting was being streamed live on the Council's You Tube channel. If live streaming failed the meeting would adjourn. If the live stream could not be restored within a reasonable period then the remaining business would be considered at a later date.

If for any reason the meeting was not quorate an Officer would notify attendees by interjecting the meeting. The meeting would adjourn immediately. Once the meeting was quorate the meeting would resume. If connection could not be restored within a reasonable period, then the remaining business would be considered at a later date.

Only Members present for the entire debate and consideration of an item were entitled to vote.

If technology failed for a Member during the debate and they rejoined the meeting, they would not be able to vote on that item.

Noise interference

Electronic devices should be muted and all present should have the mute button on their tablet or computer activated when not speaking.

Rules of Debate

The raise hand button (located under participants) should be used to alert the Chair that you wish to speak. Please wait for the Chair to invite you to speak before doing so.

Voting

Voting would be undertaken using the Green tick for “Yes”, Red Cross for “No” and Blue Raise Hand for “abstain”, located in the participants section at the bottom of the screen. To enable the votes to be counted, votes should not be cleared until requested to do so.

Details of how Members voted will not be kept or minuted unless a Recorded Vote was requested or an individual requests that their vote be recorded, and it will not be heard or seen on the audio and YouTube recordings of the meeting.

2 ELECTION OF A CHAIR FOR THE CIVIC YEAR 2020/21

Audio Recording – 5 minutes 24 seconds

The Committee, Members and Scrutiny Manager called for nominations for Chair of the Hitchin Committee for the Civic Year 2020/21.

Councillor Martin Stears-Handscorn proposed, Councillor Judi Billing seconded and there being no further nominations it was:

RESOLVED: That Councillor Ian Albert be appointed Chair of the Hitchin Committee for the Civic Year 2020/21.

Councillor Ian Albert took the chair.

3 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio Recording – 6 minutes 13 seconds

County Councillor David Barnard apologised that he would be unable to attend this meeting.

4 ELECTION OF A VICE-CHAIR FOR THE CIVIC YEAR 2020/21

Audio Recording – 6 minutes 35 seconds

The Chair called for nominations for the Vice-Chair of Hitchin Committee for the Civic Year 2020/21.

Councillor Martin Stears-Handscorn proposed, Councillor Judi Billing seconded and there being no further nominations it was:

RESOLVED: That Councillor Clare Billing be appointed Vice-Chair of Hitchin Committee for the Civic Year 2020/21.

5 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio Recording – 7 minutes 24 seconds

There was no other business notified.

6 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio Recording – 7 minutes 36 seconds

- (1) The Chair thanked those who had attended Town Talk and welcomed those who were speaking at Public Participation.
- (2) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council policy, this meeting was being audio recorded and live streamed on the Council's YouTube channel.
- (3) Members were reminded to make declarations of interest before an item, the longer reminder about this and speaking rights was set out under Chairman's Announcements on the agenda.

7 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - PHASE

Audio Recording – 9 minutes 10 seconds

Mr Kieran Murphy, Phase, thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee in support of their grant application as follows:

- Phase existed to see the wellbeing of children thrive and believe that children and young people should have access to the tolls to do that;
- Phase had developed a programme to promote and support the wellbeing of children and young people to with mental health issues;
- Their vision was to engage with children and young people at an early stage;
- They were asking for grant funding to support virtual counselling to 34 young people.
- A significant increase in funding was required for organisations such as Phase that support young people's mental health;
- Young people were struggling with anxiety about missing being at school due the Covid-19 situation and were also anxious at returning;
- Phase supported young people in respect of issues such as the breakdown of relationships and loss of confidence as well as school refusers and young carers.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Simon Harwood;
- Councillor Richard Thake.

In response to questions Mr Murphy advised:

- The funding requested would provide a 121 service;
- Referrals were received from schools, parents or the young people themselves;
- They were already providing YouTube content;
- They had introduced a YouTube programme aimed at those transferring from year 6 to year 7;
- They supported schools with current programmes;
- They were also working on how to support parents as it was important that the adult population was healthy and well.

The Chair thanked Mr Murphy for his presentation.

8 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - BIM AFOLAMI MP

Audio Recording – 25 minutes 34 seconds

The Chair advised that he had met Mr Afolami some weeks ago to discuss business grant scheme and that approximately £25 million had been paid to businesses across Hertfordshire to more than 2,000 businesses.

There were, at that point, however some businesses that did not meet the criteria.

Subsequently the Government had authorised £1.3 million to allocate to 200 businesses that had previously not qualified for funding.

This was a great example of partnership working.

A number of Members were therefore disappointed to have read a number of open letters from Mr Afolmai in the press regarding free parking.

Mr Bim Afolami MP thanked the Chair for inviting him to attend the meeting. He advised that;

- in his opinion, free parking was important for the recovery of Hitchin town centre;
- It had been already been really tough for retail business, but would be even harder now;
- The Council had limited resources, but this was one thing that could be done quickly;
- It would give a signal to the public to come into Hitchin and free parking could increase footfall;
- He acknowledged the criticism of the idea including that people may return to the town centre without this initiative and that it would cost a lot of money;
- If this increased footfall by 10 percent it could mean more businesses surviving;
- The costs associated with a short period of a support scheme would be more sustainable in the long term;
- Reserves were for a rainy day and this is it;
- There would be a support package from Government, but Council's would need to draw on reserves.

The following Members asked questions and took part in the debate:

- Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb;
- Councillor Paul Clark;
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg;
- Councillor Simon Harwood;
- Councillor Kay Tart;
- Councillor Richard Thake;
- Councillor Judi Billing;
- Councillor Keith Hoskins;
- Councillor Ian Albert.

Comments made by Councillors included:

- Councillors had been working to open town centres following Government advice to give as much support as possible;
- The Council finances were already £2 million short;
- The Council would lose £200,000 per month if it provided free car parking across the District which would result in other services being cut;
- Town centres were not yet fully open therefore it was too early to look at free parking;
- What evidence was there that paid parking was reducing footfall;
- We should be encouraging walking and cycling rather than car use;

- Hitchin car parks have historically been at capacity;
- Any initiative would have to be District wide;
- What evidence was there that free parking would bolster the economy;
- A range of ideas were needed to support town centres;
- The BID was of the opinion that free car parks would be full of commuters rather than shoppers;
- Although wanted to encourage business, had to be mindful of safety and the need for social distancing;
- Targeted free parking could be considered, although a firm proposal was needed.
- There was no evidence that this was what the people of Hitchin wanted.

In response to questions and comments Mr Afolami advised:

- He could not confirm that Government funding would be available for free parking schemes;
- The arguments put forward were a good reason to introduce the scheme, but maybe at a later date when more shops were open;
- This could be a key part of the Town Centre recovery;
- The Chancellor was committed to reform in respect of Business Rates;
- People in North Herts relied on cars and it was better to bring business into the town centre than for delivery drivers to travel long distances to deliver to your door;
- Discussions were taking place regarding a discretionary fund for businesses that were not previously covered;
- A lot of places were providing free car parking;
- There was no evidence statistically regarding this at present.
- The numbers of people commuting by train was still low;
- Town centre safety was being well managed in Hitchin;
- He would draw up a proposal and present it in writing to the Council.

The Chair thanked Mr Afolami for attending the Committee meeting.

9 HITCHIN BID MANAGER

Audio Recording – 1 hour 16 minutes 25 seconds

Mr Tom Hardy, Hitchin BID Manager, thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee regarding the events and issues in the Hitchin BID Area as follows:

- At the start of the Covid-19 lockdown the BID were supporting businesses by providing updates;
- They then moved to supporting businesses to access financial support;
- The discretionary grants had been well received;
- They had now moved to supporting businesses with advice on safe reopening;
- They had made bulk purchases of PPE;
- Barriers had been installed for social distancing;
- The High Street would be shut to traffic from 9am to 5pm and Bucklersbury would be for pedestrians only;
- A lot of businesses had been selling online;
- A new website had been set up call Hitchin Basket.com which advises where things could be bought. This site had received 7,000 visits in the first week;
- Pubs were not allowed to serve alcohol on the pavements;
- The BID staff were now back at work;
- The floral displays had been installed;

- The Christmas tree had been chosen, although it was unknown what the Christmas Lights Switch On would look like;
- They were reminding people what is being done outside and what the shops were doing inside to keep people safe including stickers and one way systems;
- A Shop Safe Campaign was needed;
- Collection rates for the levy had not been as high this year, due to many shops not being open;
- The Bid was grateful for the support from the Council and the capital grant would be spent on refurbishing the offices.
- There had been several new openings including a furniture shop, hairdressers and Chicken George;
- They were looking at accessing the opening the highstreets funding;
- In respect of free parking, he felt that this would be used by businesses and commuters rather than able to be used by shoppers. He felt that pay on exit schemes would be more beneficial than free parking

The following Members asked questions and took part in the debate:

- Councillor Judi Billing;
- Councillor Sam Collins;
- Councillor Paul Clark;
- Councillor Mike Hughson;
- Councillor Kay Tart;
- Councillor Keith Hoskins;
- Councillor Simon Harwood;
- Councillor Claire Billing;

In response to questions Mr Hardy advised:

- A few businesses chose to refund parking charges, but this would not generally be well received;
- Hitchin Basket can be useful for those who have been shielding;
- Need a District Wide shop safe campaign to guide businesses on how to help and support customers with different needs.

Mr Hardy thanked NHDC for the support given.

The Chair thanked Mr Hardy for his presentation.

NB: The Chair adjourned the meeting at 21.20 for a comfort break.

The meeting reconvened at 21.28.

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager undertook a roll call of Members and Officers to ensure that they could hear and be heard.

10 ANNUAL UPDATE ON S106 OBLIGATIONS FOR HITCHIN COMMITTEE

Audio Recording – 1 hour 55 minutes 27 seconds

The Development and Conservation Manager presented the report entitled Annual Update on S106 Obligations for Hitchin Committee together with the following appendix:

- Appendix 1 - Table 4 - Current held funds for Hitchin.

He drew attention to the following:

- It had been hoped that there would be more to report, this was due to the examination of the Local Plan having been cancelled due to the Covid.19 Pandemic.
- New dates for these hearings had not yet been set and this had an impact on the presentation of the SPDs.
- The Developer Contributions SPD would be presented to Cabinet in July;
- A regarding whether the Council would adopt CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) would be considered by Cabinet in December;
- Paragraph 4.2 detailed a new requirement to administer and report to central Government being an audit of all Section 106 activity;
- Paragraph 8.4.5 detailed the funds Section 106 discretionary funds remaining.

The following Members asked questions and took part in the debate:

- Councillor Paul Clark;
- Councillor Simon Harwood;
- Councillor Ian Albert.

In response to questions the Development and Conservation Manager advised:

- That monies allocated for Public Realm had to be spent on permanent infrastructure;
- That he was mindful of the balance required enabling Councillors to remain neutral on the outcome of planning applications, whilst at the same time assisting officers to identify local projects that may benefit for S106 funding.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the content of the report entitled Annual Update on S106 Obligations for Hitchin Committee be noted;
- (2) That a report shall continue to be presented on an annual basis to the Hitchin Committee, which sets out full records of all Section 106 activity for the preceding financial year and which reflects changes in legislation and practice;
- (3) That, other than where a contribution has been negotiated for a specific purpose or project, Ward Members of the area where the Section 106 Obligation or Unilateral Undertaking funding is generated and the Area Committee be consulted prior to funding being allocated away from that area. Members must note that the discretionary funds are rapidly diminishing and will not be replaced under current legislation and practice, for reasons that are set out in this report.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) To ensure that there is a robust system for negotiating and managing Section 106 Obligations and Unilateral Undertakings, that records activity for each financial year and is placed in the public domain.
- (2) To ensure that the process is kept under constant review and Member scrutiny and that the risk associated with this activity is managed in an appropriate manner.

11 GRANTS & COMMUNITY UPDATE

Audio Recording – 2 hours 6 minutes 56 seconds

The Assistant Community Engagement Officer presented the report entitled Grants and Community Update together with the following appendix:

- Appendix 1 - 2020/21 financial year budget sheet.

She drew attention to Section 8 of the report which detailed the work undertaken by the Community Engagement Team.

The following Members asked questions and took part in the debate:

- Councillor Simon Harwood;
- Councillor Judi Billing;
- Councillor Keith Hoskins;
- Councillor Sam Collins;
- Councillor Martin Stears-Handscorn;
- Councillor Richard Thake.

Member comments focussed on activities for Armed Forces Day.

RESOLVED: That the actions taken by the Community Engagement team to promote greater community capacity and well-being for Hitchin be endorsed.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To ensure the Committee is kept informed of the work of the Community Engagement Team.

12 GRANT APPLICATION - PHASE

Audio Recording – 23 minutes 20 seconds

The Assistant Community Engagement Officer advised that the Team worked closely with Phase.

Councillor Paul Clark proposed, Councillor Mike Hughson seconded and it was:

RESOLVED: That grant funding of £1,925 be awarded to Phase (Providing Help and Support on Education) to assist with the cost of providing mentoring sessions for young people as outlined in Paragraph 8.1.1 of the report.

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

13 WARD MATTERS AND OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS - MEMBERS' REPORTS

Audio recording – 2 hours 18 minutes 14 seconds

The Chair led a discussion regarding ward issues including Councillor surgeries.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Simon Harwood;
- Councillor Richard Thake;
- Councillor Val Bryant;

- Councillor Ian Albert;
- Councillor Judi Billing;
- Councillor Sam Collins;
- Councillor Kay Tart;
- Councillor Paul Clark;
- Councillor Keith Hoskins;
- Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb

Issues raised included:

- The play park off Swinburne Avenue had started to be built;
- Parking remained an issue in Bearton Ward;
- There would be a meeting with Bim Afolami MP to discuss access to Hitchin Railway Station;
- That attendance at meetings and other events had been better whilst held on Zoom and should be considered that meetings continue in this manner;
- There had been a number of issues at Windmill Hill, the Police had been called and had used Section 35 dispersal orders;
- More/larger bins were required on Windmill Hill;
- Work was being undertaken on new anti litter signage;
- The alleyway between Walsworth Common and Common Rise which was privately owned was causing some issues as it was not being looked after;
- New benches had been installed on Walsworth Common;
- Issues with pigeons and need to find a way forward with settle.

The Assistant Community Engagement Officer advised that Zoom surgery and Town Talks were going well and drew in a different group of people. Consideration should be given to retaining some Zoom surgeries after lockdown is over.

14 POSSIBLE AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

No discussion took place regarding possible agenda items for future meetings.

The meeting closed at 10.13 pm

Chair

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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

HITCHIN COMMITTEE

**MEETING HELD THIS WILL BE A VIRTUAL MEETING
ON TUESDAY, 29TH SEPTEMBER, 2020 AT 7.30 PM**

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Ian Albert (Chair), Clare Billing (Vice-Chair), Judi Billing, Val Bryant, Paul Clark, Sam Collins, Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, Simon Harwood, Keith Hoskins, Mike Hughson and Martin Stears-Handscomb*

In Attendance: *Katie Staddon (Assistant Community Engagement Officer), William Edwards (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer) and Matthew Hepburn (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer)*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting approximately 3 members of the public, including registered speakers.*

15 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Audio recording – 7 seconds

The Chair welcomed everyone to this virtual Hitchin Committee meeting that was being conducted with Members and Officers at various locations, communicating via audio/video and online and advised that there was the opportunity for the public and press to listen and view proceedings.

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer gave advice regarding the following:

- Attendance;
- Live Streaming;
- Noise interference;
- Voting.

The Chair, Councillor Ian Albert, started the meeting proper.

16 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 5 minutes 20 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Kay Tart and Richard Thake.

17 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 5 minutes 35 seconds

There was no other business notified.

18 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 5 minutes 45 seconds

- (1) The Chair welcomed those present at the meeting, especially those who had attended to give a presentation;
- (2) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting was audio and video recorded. The audio recording would be available on Mod.Gov and the video recording via the NHDC YouTube channel.
- (3) The Chair 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.
- (4) The Chair advised that the Hitchin BID Manager would be heard prior to Public Participation and the report regarding Grants and Community Update would be considered immediately following Public Participation.

19 HITCHIN BID MANAGER

Audio recording – 6 minutes 41 seconds

Mr Tom Hardy, Hitchin BID Manager, thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a verbal presentation regarding the issues and activities in Hitchin Town Centre. He drew attention to the following:

- Hitchin BID's regular business support was ongoing.
- The introduction of al fresco eating options had been successful.
- Buskers and performers had returned to the BID area indicating increased footfall.
- PPE bought in bulk by the BID had been sold at cost to Hitchin businesses.
- Outdoor hand sanitiser stations installed had seen regular use.
- Social distancing signage had been installed.
- The day-to-day activities of BID had resumed, including the floral displays and rangers on the street.
- Mr Hardy had joined the Hitchin Markets Board to secure links between that body and the BID.
- Plans were being made for a socially distanced Christmas Market open to Hitchin businesses to ease the impact of social distancing on commerce over the period.
- Councillor Albert had supported Mr Hardy to select the town Christmas tree.
- Christmas lights would be installed and tested around late October.
- A community bauble painting project was also planned to decorate the Christmas tree.
- Two new hairdressers, a bakery, a Korean restaurant, a Mediterranean restaurant and Signing Rooms had opened.
- Businesses were doing better than anticipated, possibly due to commuter retention.

The following Members asked questions and took part in the debate:

- Councillor Judi Billing
- Councillor Paul Clark
- Councillor Mike Hughson
- Councillor Keith Hoskins
- Councillor Simon Harwood
- Councillor Ian Albert

Comments made by Councillors included that:

- It appeared that businesses in small market towns such as Hitchin were performing better than expected.
- It seemed that open air markets and areas with space between shops were preferable to enclosed shopping malls during the current pandemic.
- Vehicles were clustered around the takeaway shops and supermarkets on Nightingale Road.
- Anecdotal reports from residents suggested there is public support for the pedestrianisation of the high street.
- Town centre parking issues would not be dealt with without a comprehensive review.
- European Regional Development Fund funding could be available to provide signage and other benefits to the town and there would be benefit in seeking advice on how to make applications.

In response to questions Mr Hardy advised:

- As a result of the lockdown measures and people working from home there was an increase in people using Hitchin town centre.
- Satellite towns such as Hitchin were doing well. People were more conscious of buying locally.
- Nightingale Road and the businesses there were not part of the BID area.
- Herts County Council had been asked to run a survey on the high street road closure.
- The high street was busy before 10am with businesses deliveries.
- It had been helpful to have Rangers dealing with the road closure to allow access at important times on a discretionary basis.
- The COVID-19 Safety Fund did not offer retrospective funding and so could not be used to recoup costs of PPE purchases etc.
- The BID would work with the Council to identify other funding schemes or applications to be made.

Mr Hardy thanked NHDC for the support given.

The Chair thanked Mr Hardy for his presentation.

20 PUBLISH PARTICIPATION - HITCHIN FUN CLUB

Audio recording – 28 minutes

Councillors Judi Billing declared an interest in that her grandchildren had attended Hitchin Fun Club in the past and therefore benefited from the club. She advised that as there was no Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or declarable Interest that she would take part in the debate and vote.

Ms Lisa King, Hitchin Fun Club, thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee in support of their grant application as follows:

- Hitchin Fun Club was an afterschool childcare facility providing health, well-being and educational activities to children outside of school hours and during holiday periods.
- Hitchin Fun Club was run on a not-for-profit basis and had accessibility at its heart.
- The club had been impacted significantly by COVID-19.
- The club held staff retention as a key commitment and had been able to use emergency savings to top up wages over the lockdown/furlough period to allow them to keep their experienced team.
- The Council had provided funding from the discretionary fund to allow Hitchin Fun Club to recoup some of the money from their emergency savings used for that purpose.

- The club had re-opened now that schools had returned but child places and therefore fees were down compared to pre-pandemic levels.
- Since social distancing became a concern different equipment for outdoor play and activities had become a necessity for the club.
- Sanitisation materials had also become a significant additional cost.

The following Members asked questions and participated in the debate:

- Councillor Judi Billing;
- Councillor Simon Harwood.

The points raised included:

- The Fun Club(s) could also consider applying to Herts County Council for funding to cover COVID related shortfalls.
- Hitchin Fun Club had received prior funding from the Council and Committee and there had previously been policy restrictions that would prevent a grant in these circumstances.

The Assistant Community Engagement Officer advised the Committee that the Community Grants Policy had been changed in 2020. Therefore there were no restrictions to prevent this grant application from being approved as it had met the criteria.

The Chair thanked Ms King for her presentation.

21 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - STRATHMORE FUN CLUB

Audio recording – 36 minutes

Councillor Simon Harwood declared an interest in that his children had attended Strathmore Fun Club in the past and therefore benefited from the club. He advised that, as there was no Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or declarable Interest, he would take part in the debate and vote.

Ms Lisa King, Strathmore Fun Club, thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee in support of their grant application as follows:

- Strathmore Fun Club provided substantially the same service as the Hitchin Fun Club outlined above.
- Strathmore Fun Club had requested funds in order to improve outdoor equipment and sports facilities.
- The club wanted to broaden its focus on the fitness and wellbeing of the children it looks after.
- Cleaning and sanitisation materials had become a significant cost to the club.

The Chair thanked Ms King for her presentation.

22 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - NORTH HERTS AFRICAN CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY

Audio recording – 46 minutes

Mr Tony Williams, North Herts African-Caribbean Community (NHACC), thanked the Chair for inviting him to address the Committee regarding the activities of the NHACC and informed the Committee that:

- The NHACC had developed as a new organisation in the wake of events in the US surrounding the death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement.
- The organisation had initially intended to look at promoting events for Black History Month.
- The NHACC had since then grown rapidly into a wider and longer term community group that aimed to promote community cohesion and equality.
- Events that had to be postponed in the wake of pandemic restrictions included: cinema nights, an exhibition at North Herts museum, and hair workshops.
- Creative writing workshops had been moved online to launch in October.
- An online showcase evening had been planned featuring local spoken word artists and musicians. Stuart Lawrence, brother of the late Stephen Lawrence was also due to speak at the event.
- The NHACC had plans to work with the Young Black Futures Project to promote a Dragon's Den style business mentoring scheme.
- Proposals for a Black Britons Trail through Hitchin town centre had also been made.
- The NHACC had long term aspirations for a safe space community centre for the Black and Afro-Caribbean community in North Herts.
- NHACC had not yet gone live with its website, however, residents could retrieve more information by visiting 'Hitchin Diversity and Culture' Facebook page or by emailing blackhistorymonthnorthherts@gmail.com

Councillor Keith Hoskins asked whether the NHACC had liaised with the Hitchin BID Manager to co-ordinate on the Black Britons Trail proposal.

Mr Williams advised that they had worked primarily with Christchurch on the delivery of the trail and that boards and posters had already been produced to diversify their content but that an expanded presence in the town centre would be desirable.

The Chair thanked Mr Williams for his presentation.

23 GRANTS AND COMMUNITY UPDATE

Audio recording – 1 hour 41 seconds.

The Assistant Community Engagement Officer presented the report entitled Grants and Community Update together with the following appendix:

- Appendix 1 – 2020/21 financial year budget sheet.

The section of this report relating to Appendix 1 was presented earlier in the meeting before the grant applications.

She drew attention to Section 8 of the report which detailed the work of the Community Engagement Team.

She updated the Committee on the status of the Coronavirus Community Support Fund and advised that:

- The fund had been successful and the team were pleased to support a wide range of organisations in the District.
- The fund had a budget of approximately £150,000
- Approximately £73,700 had been utilised so far, with a further £4000 in pending grant applications.
- Organisations specific to Hitchin which had received funding included Tilehouse Counselling, Phase, Built on Faith Church (food provision) and the Hitchin Food Provision Team.

RESOLVED: That the actions taken by the Community Engagement team to promote greater community capacity and well-being for Hitchin be endorsed.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

- (1) To ensure the Committee is kept informed of the work of the Community Engagement Team.
- (2) This report is intended to inform Members of the financial resources available to the Committee. It draws attention to the current budgetary situation by assisting in the effective financial management of the Area Committee's budget. This ensures that all actions are performed in line with the Authority's Financial Regulations, the Council's Constitution, and the guidance of the existing Grants policy as agreed by Cabinet in January 2020.
- (3) The awarding of financial assistance to voluntary organisations and the use of discretionary spending allows the Committee to further the aims of the Council Plan.

24 GRANT APPLICATION - HITCHIN FUN CLUB

Audio recording – 44 minutes

Councillor Martin Stears-Handscorn proposed, Councillor Paul Clark seconded and it was:

RESOLVED: That grant funding of £900 be awarded to Hitchin Fun Club to assist with the cost of art, sport and cleaning equipment.

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

25 GRANT APPLICATION - STRATHMORE FUN CLUB

Audio recording – 44 minutes

N.B Both grant applications were moved together as a single vote.

Councillor Martin Stears-Handscorn proposed, Councillor Paul Clark seconded and it was:

RESOLVED: That grant funding of £1000 be awarded to Strathmore Fun Club to assist with the cost of new sports and outdoor equipment.

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

26 WARD MATTERS AND OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS - MEMBERS' REPORTS

Audio recording – 1 hour 8 minutes 30 seconds

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer updated the committee on arrangements for Remembrance Sunday in Hitchin.

The Chair led a discussion regarding ward issues and outside organisations.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Keith Hoskins
- Councillor Simon Harwood

- Councillor Mike Hughson
- Councillor Judi Billing
- Councillor Martin Stears-Handscorn
- Councillor Sam Collins

Issues raised include:

- Vandalism of picnic benches in King George V Playing Fields had been reported. A Section 106 Request was being considered to part-fund the replacement of the picnic benches in the playing fields.
- Hitchin Festival which would have taken place in the Dell had been postponed and discussion regarding its future would likely feature at the next Town Talk.
- Community Centres in the area had been struggling since COVID-19, in particular with respect to frequent changes in regulations.
- The Town Hall had faced similar issues.
- Traffic surveys had been carried out with much effort since 2016 resulting in changes to speed limits in certain areas. The County Council's current speed management strategy had made progress on identifying new areas and adjustments to existing limitations slow.
- A vocal community group and petition had arisen highlighting speed management issues in the region which had been helpful for facilitating meetings between County Council officers and other stakeholders.
- The future of Priory Fields in Hitchin had come in to question and avenues for protecting them in future should be explored.
- A potential developer involved in HS2-related construction had opened an online consultation on their proposed development.

RESOLVED: That the Assistant Community Engagement Officer be requested to circulate COVID guidance to all Community Centres and to all Members the Hitchin Committee.

REASON FOR DECISION: To help facilitate skill sharing meetings.

27 POSSIBLE AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Audio recording – 1 hour 40 minutes.

The Chair requested that, should any Members have any suggestions for agenda items for future meetings, they advise himself, officers or the Committee Clerk.

RESOLVED: That the following items be discussed at future meetings of this committee:

- Protecting Priory Field
- Air Quality Update
- Hitchin Station Access
- Fair Trade Town status
- Churchgate Centre

REASON FOR DECISION: To keep the Hitchin Committee apprised of issues affecting the Hitchin area.

The meeting closed at 9.15 pm

Chair

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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

HITCHIN COMMITTEE

**MEETING HELD AS THIS WILL BE A VIRTUAL MEETING
ON TUESDAY, 1ST DECEMBER, 2020 AT 7.30 PM**

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Councillor Ian Albert (Chair), Councillor Clare Billing (Vice-Chair), Judi Billing, Val Bryant, Paul Clark, Sam Collins, Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, Simon Harwood, Keith Hoskins, Mike Hughson, Martin Stears-Handscomb and Richard Thake*

In Attendance: *Katie Staddon (Assistant Community Engagement Officer), Matthew Hepburn (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer) and William Edwards (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer).*

Also Present: *1 member of the public, including registered speakers, joined the meeting at 7:45 PM.*

28 WELCOME AND REMOTE/PARTLY REMOTE MEETINGS PROTOCOL SUMMARY

Audio Recording – 7 seconds.

The Chair welcomed everyone to this virtual Hitchin Committee meeting that was being conducted with Members and Officers at various locations, communicating via audio/video and online and advised that there was the opportunity for the public and press to listen and view proceedings.

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer gave advice regarding the following:

- Attendance;
- Live Streaming;
- Noise interference;
- Voting.

The Chair, Councillor Ian Albert, started the meeting proper.

29 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2 minutes 47 seconds.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Kay Tart.

Apologies for absence were also received from Tom Hardy – Hitchin BID Manager.

30 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 47 seconds.

There was no other business notified.

31 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 47 seconds.

- (1) The Chair welcomed those present at the meeting, especially those who had attended to give a presentation;
- (2) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded;
- (3) The Chair 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.
- (4) The Chair advised that Tom Hardy – Hitchin BID Manager had sent his apologies and therefore there would be no update as per Item 6 on the Agenda.
- (5) Members were reminded that it had been agreed that in view of the ongoing Local Plan Examination Hearings there would be no discussion of matters connected to Priory Fields.

32 HITCHIN BID MANAGER

Audio recording – 4 minutes.

Mr Tom Hardy, Hitchin BID Manager, had sent his apologies and was not in attendance.

The Chair noted that grants available to local businesses from NHDC had gone live and were now taking applications and details were available on the NHDC website.

33 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 14 minutes.

N.B: Christine Kell joined the meeting around 19:45 and this presentation was given after consideration of the two Information Notes of the Interim Property Consultant.

Christine Kell, Hitchin Quaker Meeting, thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee in support of their grant application including:

- Christine was speaking on behalf of Peace Garden committee of the Hitchin Quakers;
- The location of the Peace Garden was a prime site in Hitchin in front of the Friends' Meeting House situated in Payne's Park;
- Earlier development of the peace garden involved transforming the burial ground underneath their pillared building in to a peace garden as a contribution to commemorations of World War I;
- The peace garden included a dove pond, benches, picnic table, sun dial, peace pole, and mosaic;
- The final main attraction would be to install a sculpture;
- The peace garden was open to everybody and not a religious endeavour; they intended the grounds to be open to the people of Hitchin and visitors of any faith or none;
- They had asked the students of a nearby school for designs that would be fitting for a peace garden; 3 were put forward and 1 chosen which was called 'Unity,' consisting of two intertwined stainless steel loops, with plaque noting importance of unity in times of division;

- The sculpture was the one feature of the garden that needed professional work costing about £10,000;
- They had first approached the Arts Council but at present no support was available due to overwhelming demand in pandemic conditions;
- They had been saving funds for a while to update their toilet facilities and make them accessible which had left no money in their reserves to fund this project.

The following Members asked questions or contributed to the discussion:

- Councillor Sam Collins
- Councillor Keith Hoskins
- Councillor Judi Billing
- Councillor Dr Simon Harwood
- Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb
- Councillor Richard Thake

In response to questions, Ms Christine Kell noted:

- The Peace Garden committee took the view that while the garden did not answer the same kind of material need as a food bank or similar that it did still have value for the people of Hitchin;
- If the Committee were minded to grant the application it would represent the start of their fundraising effort and hopefully attract future donations;
- Applications had been made or were being made to organisations including: Hitchin Rotary Club(s), Herts Community Foundation, the Herts Community Innovation Fund, and via a crowdfunding platform;
- The Peace Garden committee would also get in contact with County Councillors in the Hitchin area for support.

The Chair thanked Christine Kell for her presentation.

34 GRANT APPLICATION - HITCHIN QUAKER MEETING

Audio Recording – 27 minutes 14 seconds.

The Chair led a debate on the award of grant funding as per the application submitted by the Hitchin Quaker Meeting.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Dr Simon Harwood
- Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb
- Councillor Paul Clark

- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Judi Billing

Issues raised included:

- The project was of merit and the importance of promoting the arts, culture, and mental and social wellbeing was noted;
- £2000 was however a large amount of money in terms of grant allocation from this Committee;
- Residents might have questions about the allocation of that amount in this time of particular need;
- There was not a long queue of other applications for money from the Hitchin Committee;
- A number of other funds existed to support COVID-based projects and associated needs;
- The Committee had not granted funding for arts and culture-based projects recently;
- Granting this application could demonstrate the Committee's commitment to holistic wellbeing;
- The total funds necessary were more likely to be raised if the Committee granted this application;
- Moneys awarded in one budgetary year are usually allowed to be carried forward for spending in future years and granting this application now would not impact a future budget allocation if the fundraising reaches completion in a few years' time;
- The disbursement of funds and grants was a large part of Council business and a lot of that work in recent months focussed on COVID response projects; this application represents a glimpse of a return to normality.

In response to questions the Assistant Community Engagement Officer advised that as in the report there was an understanding that full funding for the project had not yet been sought and that NHDC would retain any offered contribution until the full amount had been secured. The Hitchin Quaker Meeting would have 1 year to secure full funding which was the usual time scale for projects of this sort and if the funds were not spent within that time the Committee would have to reconsider the allocation.

Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb proposed and Councillor Paul Clark seconded and upon the vote it was:

RESOLVED: That grant funding of £2000 be awarded to Hitchin Quaker Meeting to assist with the cost of installing a sculpture in the Hitchin Peace Garden.

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

35 INFORMATION NOTE - CHARNWOOD HOUSE

Audio Recording – 5 minutes 43 seconds.

The Chair drew Members attention to the content of the Information Note of the Interim Property Consultant entitled "Information Note – Charnwood House,"

The Chair invited Councillor Keith Hoskins to provide a verbal update.

Councillor Keith Hoskins updated the Committee including:

- He was keen to see the site retained for community use;
- The site would be the subject of a discussion in Cabinet next month;
- He would be happy to report back to this committee in future on the outcome of those discussions;
- Along with Councillor Simon Harwood he would arrange a meeting with Charnwood Trust, a community organisation keen to take on the running of the establishment.

The Chair advised that he would be keen to have a more detailed discussion on this item at a future meeting. He noted that wider consultation with residents in Hitchin around these proposals was important and emphasised the role of this committee in that process.

Councillor Simon Harwood advised he had been at the AGM of the Charnwood Trust and had raised initial discussions with Councillor Hoskins about potential lottery funding and would appreciate any guidance from Members who have had experience with these processes.

It was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee note the content of the Information Note of the Interim Property Consultant entitled "Information Note - Charnwood House"

REASON: That the Committee be kept informed of matters of interest to residents of Hitchin.

36 INFORMATION NOTE - RIVERSIDE WALK

Audio Recording – 10 minutes.

The Chair drew Members' attention to the content of the information note of the Interim Property Consultant entitled "Information Note – Riverside Walk."

The Chair invited Councillor Hoskins to provide a verbal update.

Councillor Keith Hoskins updated the Committee including:

- The final steps of the process were underway and were in the hands of the Council's legal department;

The following Members asked questions and contributed to the discussion:

- Councillor Dr Simon Harwood
- Councillor Martin Stears-Handscorn;

In response to questions Councillor Hoskins advised:

- The transfer of land on the Sun Street side of the river was currently under negotiation;
- There had been ongoing difficulties with other parties which had prevented previous transfers.

It was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee note the content of the Information Note of the Interim Property Consultant entitled “Information Note – Riverside Walk.”

REASON: That the Committee be kept informed of matters of interest to residents of Hitchin.

37 GRANTS & COMMUNITY UPDATE

Audio Recording – 38 minutes 30 seconds.

The Assistant Community Engagement Officer presented the report entitled “Grants & Community Update” along with the following appendix:

- Appendix 1 – 2020/21 Financial year budget sheet

The officer drew Members’ attention to section 8.2 of the report which detailed the work of the community engagement team including the following:

- The first special Arts & Culture themed Town Talk on 19th October had been a success and Members had discussion with key providers in Hitchin, leading to the formation of a follow-up subcommittee meeting on 9th December which would discuss how to celebrate Hitchin culture in 2021 and how arts providers could work collaboratively with the Council;
- A second wider meeting of the town talk was planned for January;
- Events for the commemoration of Holocaust Memorial Day on 27th January had been arranged along a theme of ‘Be the light in the darkness,’ and the digital order of service was being finalised;
- Rabbi Alan Garber from the Shenley United Synagogue would be leading the service this year and presentations would be made by other contributors including members of the North Herts Interfaith Forum;
- A presentations would also be given by Yanky Fachler whose family moved to Letchworth around the time of the Second World War and video testimonial is to be shown from Ivor Pearl, a survivor of the Holocaust;
- Nominations for the Chair’s Volunteer Achievement Awards were now open and being promoted; there were 4 categories this year with an expanded ‘caring,’ award to include COVID-support;
- The nomination deadline was Friday 18th December and further information was available on the Council’s website;

The officer updated Members on the Coronavirus Community Support Fund and advised:

- £77,700 of the fund of the rough budget of £150,000 had been spent with £3,500 worth of grants pending for Kings Community Church, North Herts and Stevenage Samaritans, which if approved would put sending at £81,200.

The officer updated Members on the work of the Food Provision Network and advised:

- Officers had allocated a DEFRA grant in the form of supermarket vouchers to smaller scale foodbanks in rural areas who had received little or no prior grant funding from NHDC in the past;
- The team was in the process of putting together a roundup of food provision options over the festive period.

The Chair thanked the Assistant Community Engagement Officer for their report and their work in the Food Provision Network.

It was:

RESOLVED: To endorse the actions taken by the Community Engagement Team to promote greater community capacity and well-being for Hitchin.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure the Committee is kept informed of the work of the Community Engagement Team.

38 AIR QUALITY STATUS REPORT

Audio Recording – 47 minutes 44 seconds.

The Chair led a discussion on the Air Quality Status Report.

The following Members asked questions and took part in the discussion:

- Councillor Dr Simon Harwood
- Councillor Sam Collins
- Councillor Clare Billing
- Councillor Richard Thake
- Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg
- Councillor Paul Clark
- Councillor Ian Albert

Issues raised during the discussion included:

- The report made use of industry and scientific technical language and was difficult for Members to understand without an Officer's report or presentation;

- The Air Quality Monitoring Area on the Three Moorhens roundabout in Hitchin should not be closed;
- There was not enough air quality monitoring in Hitchin;
- The goal of having 5% electric vehicle charging facility in car parking spaces across the District was inadequate in view of the number of EV charging points the UK would require in the near future;
- The report read as if improvements in air quality were as a result of Council work where in fact changes in the automotive industry are the main source of improvement;
- Ongoing inquests in to deaths purportedly caused by air pollution meant that air quality is an essential issue for councillors to consider;
- The issue of air quality should be considered by the Cabinet Panel on the Environment;
- Issues of noise pollution were also important.

It was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Environmental Protection & Housing Manager be requested to arrange attendance at a future meeting of the Hitchin Committee to discuss some of the issues contained in the 2020 Air Quality Status Report.
- (2) That the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer be requested to convey the views of the Hitchin Committee and to refer the 2020 Air Quality Status Report to the joint Chairs of the Cabinet Panel on the Environment as a possible item for debate at a future meeting.

REASON FOR DECISION:

- (1) That the Committee be apprised of issues affecting the Hitchin area.
- (2) To further the Council objective of responding to challenges to the environment.

39 WARD MATTERS AND OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS - MEMBERS' REPORTS

Audio recording – 1 hour 7 minutes and 8 seconds.

The Chair led a discussion regarding ward matters and outside organisations.

Members gave updates including:

Hitchin Station Access

Councillor Paul Clark advised that work on Station Access is continuing; concerns about the loss of Section 106 funding had been allayed; the next meeting of the working group had been pushed back in order to identify case studies and future funding options.

The Chair noted that there were some long term issues about the moving of the aggregate site balanced with the current needs for pedestrian and cyclist access.

North Herts College Development

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg advised that Section 106 funding which had been allocated for station access from the North Herts College development had been rescued as a result of pressure from local Members and officers. This was particularly beneficial in view of the increased number of residents making use of the station because of the proposed housing development. She further noted that the low level of social housing allocation within the development had been seen as a trade-off for the other benefits to infrastructure and sporting facilities included in the scheme.

Councillor Val Bryant advised she had been on the Planning Committee which approved the application and explained her reservations around the concept of an enabling development, the level of social housing, and the proposed building materials.

Councillor Mike Hughson advised that decisions of the Planning Control Committee were constrained by planning law. He noted that Members should not be angry at North Herts College itself but consider examining why the College was in need of financial relief.

Hitchin Initiative

Councillor Keith Hoskins provided an update on the relaunch of the Hitchin Initiative with a new structure and a refocussed direction. The initiative was still in its early stages but there were promising signs of collaboration between private enterprise and local government and the Initiative would dovetail with the work of this Committee and other existing panels.

Hitchin Town Hall

Councillor Paul Clark raised the issue of the sprung floor in the Town Hall with a missing metal key and requested whether the Committee could undertake work to locate or replace a key.

Councillor Keith Hoskins advised that the Town Hall fell under his remit and he would take the issue on.

Councillor Judi Billing advised that Members consider settling issues like this between themselves rather than bringing them as items for the Hitchin Committee.

North Hertfordshire Museum

Councillor Paul Clark advised that residents had asked to see a greater prominence of Fair Trade products at the Museum and that he would take this issue up with his ward colleague Councillor Keith Hoskins.

Councillor Keith Hoskins advised that it had been made clear with a displayed sticker that the Museum (and indeed the Council as a whole) stocked fair trade products.

Hitchin Band

Councillor Dr Simon Harwood updated the Committee on the status of the Hitchin Band which was looking to move in to permanent premises and alerted colleagues to the commercial opportunity this represented.

Councillor Keith Hoskins advised that this was part of his portfolio and that himself and officers were dealing with various applicants including the Hitchin Band looking for premises within the town centre.

40 POSSIBLE AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Audio recording – 1 hour 25 minutes and 10 seconds.

The Chair requested that, should any Members have any suggestions for agenda items for future meetings, they advise himself, officers or the Committee Clerk.

Councillor Mike Hughson requested that a report on Arts & Culture in Hitchin be consider as an item for a future meeting.

Councillor Judi Billing gave her apologies for behaviour earlier in the meeting.

Councillor Judi Billing requested that the Committee discuss how Members make the best use of the Hitchin Committee to respond to complicated issues which engage a range of areas including Planning, Licensing, Environmental Health etc.

Councillor Martin Stears-Handscorn requested that a report on the recovery of Hitchin businesses in future.

Councillor Dr Simon Harwood supported Councillor Judi Billing's request for a discussion on maximising Committee effectiveness and highlighted the issue of engagement with the County Council.

Councillor Judi Billing advised that County Councillors for Hitchin had always been invited to attend meetings of the Hitchin Committee with full speaking and debating rights. She noted that engaging County Council officers in County issues that impacted District Council members was a continued difficulty.

Councillor Mike Hughson noted that the advice of County Council highways officers at planning control meetings had been useful.

Councillor Mike Hughson gave his thanks to Councillor Ian Albert for his contribution of the lights on the Hitchin Christmas tree.

RESOLVED: The following would be discussed at a future meeting of the Committee:

- The Food Provision Network
- Arts & Culture in Hitchin
- Managing complex Council issues and maximising effectiveness as a Committee
- Mental health provision in the area
- Air Quality

REASON FOR DECISION: To keep the Committee apprised of issues affecting the Hitchin area.

Audio Recording of Meeting

The meeting closed at 9.05 pm

Tuesday, 1st December, 2020

Chair

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**HITCHIN COMMITTEE
2 MARCH 2021**

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER: HITCHIN BRIDGE CLUB

REPORT OF THE SENIOR ESTATES SURVEYOR

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: CLLR JARVIS, EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT & LEISURE

COUNCIL PRIORITY: BUILD THRIVING AND RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Hitchin Committee consider and comment on the report entitled Community Asset Transfer: Hitchin Bridge Club prior to consideration by Cabinet.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To enable the comments of the Hitchin Committee to be considered by Cabinet.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 No alternative options considered.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1 The attached report is due to be considered by Cabinet on 16th March 2021.
- 5.2 Details regarding consultation on the substantive report are included in that report.
- 5.3 The Chair of the Hitchin Committee has requested that the Hitchin Committee be given the opportunity to comment on the substantive report prior to consideration by Cabinet.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.
- 6.2 The attached report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on 7th December 2020.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 The attached report was due to be considered by Cabinet on 26th January 2021.
- 7.2 The Chair of the Hitchin Committee requested that the report be considered by that Committee prior to consideration by Cabinet.
- 7.3 Following this request the report will now be considered by Hitchin Committee on 2nd March 2021 and by Cabinet on 16th March 2021.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 That the Hitchin Committee be given the opportunity to consider and comment on the substantive report prior to consideration by Cabinet.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 None relating directly to this covering report.
- 9.2 Legal implications regarding the substantive report are detailed in that report.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 None relating directly to this covering report.
- 10.2 Financial implications regarding the substantive report are detailed in that report.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 None relating directly to this covering report.
- 11.2 Risk implications regarding the substantive report are detailed in that report.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 None relating directly to this covering report.
- 12.2 Financial implications regarding the substantive report are detailed in that report.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 None relating directly to this covering report.
- 14.2 Environmental implications regarding the substantive report are detailed in that report.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 There are no human resource implications.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 Report due to be considered by Cabinet on 16th March 2021.
- 16.2 Appendix A: Site plan of NHDC's freehold recreation ground.
- 16.3 Appendix B: Site plan of HBC's proposed lease demise.
- 16.4 Appendix C: HBC's expression of interest.
- 16.5 Appendix D: Comments from HBC members on benefits of playing bridge.
- 16.6 Appendix E: HBC and its relationship with Hitchin, the local and wider community.
- 16.7 Appendix F: Membership breakdown of HBC.
- 16.8 Appendix G: HBC during Covid-19 lockdown.
- 16.9 Appendix H: NHDC's insight on Community Asset Transfer request by HBC.
- 16.10 Appendix I: Equality Analysis.
- 16.11 Appendix J: Environmental Impact Assessment.

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

- 17.1 Christopher Robson, Senior Estates Surveyor christopher.robson@north-herts.gov.uk; ext 4252.
- 17.2 Andrew Mills, Service Manager Greenspace andrew.mills@north-herts.gov.uk; ext 4272.

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 18.1 None.

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REPORT DUE TO BE CONSIDERED BY CABINET ON 16th March 2021

TITLE OF REPORT: COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER: HITCHIN BRIDGE CLUB

REPORT OF: SENIOR ESTATES SURVEYOR

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: CLLR JARVIS, EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT & LEISURE

COUNCIL PRIORITY: BUILD THRIVING AND RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 To seek Cabinet's decision in principle to grant a leasehold interest in land at Cadwell Lane, Hitchin to Hitchin Bridge Club (HBC).

OR:

1.2 To seek Cabinet's agreement to place the matter into abeyance until HBC obtains pre-application advice from the local Planning authority and Highway authority on their proposed development at Cadwell Lane.

OR:

1.3 To reject the proposal to grant a leasehold interest in the land to HBC with reason(s).

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That Cabinet provides its decision in principle to grant a leasehold interest in land at Cadwell Lane, Hitchin to HBC.

OR:

2.2 That Cabinet agrees to place the matter into abeyance until the pre-application advice is obtained by HBC.

OR:

2.3 That Cabinet rejects the proposal to grant a leasehold interest in the land to HBC and provides reason(s) for this decision.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Should Cabinet decide in principle to grant a leasehold interest, this will signal officers to commence exploring the feasibility of the proposed leasehold transfer to HBC, in accordance with the Detailed Development Stage of NHDC's Community Asset Transfer (CAT) policy. This with a view to reporting back to Cabinet at a later date.

- 3.2 Should Cabinet agree to place the matter into abeyance, this will signal officers to request HBC to obtain pre-application advice from the Planning and Highway authorities on HBC's proposed development. This with a view to reporting back to Cabinet at a later date.
- 3.3 Should Cabinet reject the proposal to grant a leasehold interest in the land to HBC, officers will contact HBC to inform their expression of interest will not be pursued further by NHDC. Cabinet will need to provide a reason(s) for its decision to reject the proposal in accordance with the CAT policy, which will be communicated to HBC. Offices propose to continue discussions with HBC to consider alternative solutions as outlined in 8.13.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 No reasonable alternative options are considered.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1 The following Members, Committees and Officers have been consulted:

- Cllr Jarvis, Executive Member for Environment & Leisure.
- Cllr Albert, Executive Member for Finance & IT.
- Cllr Albert, Cllr Billing and Cllr Bryant in their capacity of Hitchin Bearton Ward Members.
- Cllr Stears-Handscomb, Leader of the Council.
- Cllr Hoskins, Enterprise and Co-Operative Development.
- Hitchin Area Committee.
- Asset Management Group.
- Leadership Team (including Service Director – Resources and the relevant Service Head).

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on 7th December 2020.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 NHDC owns the freehold interest in public recreation ground at Cadwell Lane, Hitchin. The land is indicated by the area shaded pink and yellow edged blue on the site plan in Appendix A. The land is approximately 4.19 acres in total and is comprised in the two Title Numbers HD493650 and HD524230. The land is laid out as a football pitch and is in serviceable condition. A single storey football pavilion of circa 60 square metres gross external area stood on part of the land. This was demolished in 2018. No replacement structure has since been erected. The land has a recorded asset valuation of £25,000, based on existing use. This value would increase if planning permission for development of the land is granted.

- 7.2 NHDC has received an expression of interest from HBC to acquire a leasehold interest in circa 0.35 acres of the land. This expression invokes NHDC's CAT policy. The area shaded yellow edged blue on the site plan in Appendix B indicates the extent of the proposed lease demise. Apportioning the existing use asset valuation stated in 7.1 by area indicates this land has an asset value of just over £2,000.
- 7.3 This report details the expression of interest, provides background information and evaluates the proposed leasehold transfer in the context of NHDC, HBC and the wider community. This in order to assist Cabinet in making a decision in principle regarding the proposed leasehold transfer of NHDC's land.
- 7.4 To date, no feedback has been received from those consulted in 5.1, except from Asset Management Group. The Group enquired whether the CAT policy applies to HBC's expression of interest to acquire an interest in land, as opposed to an existing building. NHDC's Service Director - Legal & Community subsequently confirmed that the policy *does* apply to this case.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 Hitchin Bridge Club is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), registered at the Charity Commission for England and Wales under charity number 1140362. According to figures published on the Charity Commission's website, for the five financial periods ending 31st December 2015 to 31st December 2019, the mean yearly average of HBC's total income was £31,978. The mean yearly average of its total expenditure for the same period was £19,310. HBC members and visitors are from across the district and surrounding counties. HBC has seven trustees, 268 members and its stated charitable objects are as follows:

(a)

The advancement of amateur sport by promoting the game of bridge for the benefit of the residents of Hitchin and the surrounding area.

(b)

The provision of facilities for the learning, teaching and playing of bridge for the benefit of the residents of Hitchin and the surrounding area with the object of improving conditions of life.

- 8.2 HBC's expression of interest under the CAT policy proposes that NHDC grants HBC a long lease in part of the recreation ground at Cadwell Lane to enable HBC to then construct and operate a permanent club house with surface car park. This to support and sustain the Club's charitable objects and activities. NHDC would retain the freehold. Initial details proposed by HBC to date are:

The lease

- Landlord: NHDC. Tenant: HBC.
- Contractual term of 99 years.
- Tenant responsible for full repairs and insurance of building and car park.
- Annual ground rent of £500 (equating to circa £1,429 per acre or £0.03 per square foot).
- Security of tenure under Landlord and Tenant Act 1954, Part II.
- HBC intends for the leased property to be hired by other community groups when not in use by the Club.

The development

- Single storey building.
- Sited facing Cadwell Lane to form an attractive view from road.
- Toilets and kitchen positioned close to location of services and inspection chamber.
- Building orientated to use south/south-west facing roof for solar panels. These would not be visible from road.
- Incorporate other energy saving measures.
- Surface car park located behind building.
- Vehicle entrance off current parking layby in Cadwell Lane, with lockable gate.
- Boundary line of leased area 5 metres (16 feet 5 inches) behind football pitch.
- Boundary to be planted or fenced.

Full details (including building floor area) are to be clarified and no agreements have been made to date between NHDC and HBC. Planning permission, Highway authority consent and other important matters will need to be investigated and addressed by HBC before a lease is granted. The outcome of these matters may influence the development details, the lease terms, the timing of events, and may even influence whether or not the lease proceeds.

- 8.3 HBC intends for the facility to be hired by other community groups when not in use by the Club. Based on HBC's expression of interest and status as a CIO, HBC is considered to constitute an "eligible organisation" as defined by the CAT policy to be considered for acquiring a leasehold interest.
- 8.4 HBC informs they have been seeking a permanent home for over 10 years, having examined a range of locations, ownerships and tenure. They seek a long-term self-contained arrangement rather than a temporary hire. In 2020, HBC explored leasing NHDC-owned land adjacent to St John's Community Centre in Hitchin to build a club house and car park but later withdrew this interest. The Senior Estates Surveyor enquired with the tenant of St John's Community Centre as to whether they would be willing to sub-let or assign part of the Centre to HBC. Unfortunately this option was not available. NHDC's Senior Estates Surveyor also enquired with HBC whether vacant retail premises are an option for a facility, particularly given the current supply of empty units. HBC replied that owners of such units would require commercial rents at a level outside HBC's capability as a CIO. They also informed the retail premises viewed do not offer the correct amount of sufficiently convenient car parking.

- 8.5 NHDC officers do not consider the land at Cadwell Lane that HBC proposes to lease meets the definition of “surplus” or “under-used” property in NHDC’s Asset Disposal policy. Therefore a ground rule of the CAT policy is not met. This would not necessarily preclude a leasehold transfer under the policy if it can be demonstrated the transfer could be used to achieve wider regeneration objectives or community ownership in a wider scheme. However, no such wider scheme is known of to date.
- 8.6 No other expressions of interest under the CAT policy have been submitted for the land at Cadwell Lane. Further, the land is not under contract to be used or acquired by an alternative organisation, and has not previously been agreed for disposal by Cabinet.
- 8.7 Appendices C - G comprise information provided by HBC, including their expression of interest under the CAT policy.
- 8.8 Potential benefits to HBC, Hitchin and wider community from the proposed leasehold transfer include:
- HBC secures a permanent facility to continue and reinforce its charitable objects for the benefit of HBC’s members, Hitchin and the wider community.
 - Establishes a modern setting from which HBC can expand membership and their reach within the community. This promotes wider interaction, builds connections and friendships and allows more people to engage in mentally stimulating activity in the form of bridge. Such activity will help combat health and social issues of isolation, loneliness and dementia.
 - Creates a stable and conducive facility for people to improve mathematical and behavioural skills.
 - HBC’s wide reach in terms of membership and visitors helps draw footfall into Hitchin, supporting local businesses.
- 8.9 Potential benefits to NHDC from the proposed leasehold transfer include:
- Helps avert expenditure by NHDC on hiring private accommodation. NHDC will seek to reserve a right in the lease to free use of part or all of the property for its own occasional purposes, such as polling station use. This is a request of NHDC’s Returning Officer who informs that the Cabinet Office are giving less funds, and the charges for some venues are becoming excessive.
 - HBC’s willingness to adopt energy efficient measures in the design of the facility reinforces NHDC’s commitments and aims of its Climate Change Strategy. The lease will seek to secure as many green measures as practicable.
 - Modest long-dated ground rent income stream for NHDC from an asset currently generating no income. NHDC will seek to include 5-yearly indexed upwards-only rent reviews in the lease to ensure the rent keeps pace with inflation.
 - Helps generate and maintain business rates income by drawing footfall to the area and supporting the longevity of local businesses.

- Contributes towards NHDC's priorities, in particular to build thriving and resilient communities.

8.10 Potential risks to NHDC, Hitchin and wider community from the proposed leasehold transfer include:

- Loss of part of the public recreation ground and green space. Circa 8.5% of the ground would be leased out to HBC and developed with a club house and car park.

Although the lease will require the tenant to allow use of the proposed building and car park by other community groups when not used by the tenant, it is considered this does not fully mitigate the loss of the land for public use or the loss of the environmental, social and community benefits stemming from the land. Appendix H provides further insight on this risk in the form of a report by NHDC's Place directorate.

- The out-of-town location and limited public transport provision for the proposed site will necessitate travel to and from the club house predominantly by private vehicles. This is likely to have a negative carbon impact and not support NHDC's Climate Change Strategy.
- Cannibalise proportion of demand from NHDC's community centres in Hitchin. This increases the risk of tenants of those centres surrendering their leases or exercising break options, saddling NHDC with vacant buildings, holding costs and property management responsibilities. It will be difficult to secure new tenants willing to continue running the buildings as community centres.
- Sub-optimum use of property resources. NHDC's pavilions at Swinburne Recreation Ground and Ransoms Recreation Ground may become surplus in the near future, as indicated by NHDC's report at Appendix H. It would appear a better use of land resources to consider leasing one of those buildings to HBC to repurpose or redevelop for a club house should these buildings become surplus, subject to Planning and all other relevant consents. Using existing buildings would obviate the need to build the new club house at Cadwell Lane thus saving on associated resources and embodied carbon. The buildings at Swinburne and Ransoms may need to be marketed for letting first. A letting to HBC cannot be guaranteed.
- The facility is not hired out to other community groups when not in use by the Club, or only for impractically short periods of time. NHDC will seek to incorporate a clause in the lease requiring the tenant to abide by a service level agreement or management agreement appended to the lease. This will require all reasonable endeavours to be made by the tenant to allow other community groups use of all or part of the facility for community purposes. A suitable minimum period of time for which hiring out should take place, and the time periods during which this should happen, would be included in the agreement.
- Lease granted but no development commences, or development commences but left incomplete. NHDC will seek to reduce this risk by incorporating a covenant in the lease obliging the tenant to construct the club house and car park ready for occupation and use within 12 months of commencement of the contractual term. A long stop date of 18 months may be included to allow for Planning delays. An

alternative is to incorporate a landlord break clause after 12 or 18 months operational by NHDC if the land remains undeveloped by this time. A landlord break clause, however, is likely to make it more difficult for the tenant to secure external funding for the development should they require such funding.

- Alterations are undertaken to the constructed building or car park that are unsuitable or detrimental to NHDC's adjoining land or to nearby owners and occupiers. NHDC will seek to include a clause in the lease requiring the tenant to obtain the consent of the landlord and other relevant parties prior to undertaking alterations and to reverse alterations that have not been granted consent.
- The tenant persistently fails to abide by the lease, for example fails to keep the property in good repair. This risk will be reduced by including forfeiture provision in the lease to assist NHDC in taking back possession of the property in the event of such a scenario.
- The tenant uses the property for commercial activities commanding a higher rent than the rent proposed. NHDC will seek to reduce this risk by only permitting change of use subject to landlord's prior consent. However, confining the use may restrict the rent achievable at reviews. An alternative is to permit change of use subject to landlord's consent and stipulating such consent is not to be unreasonably withheld. This will support a higher rent at reviews, although the Landlord and Tenant Act 1927 states that a proviso will be deemed to apply (unless structural alterations are involved) that a landlord (who is minded to grant consent) cannot demand a premium or increase in rent for providing its consent to the new use. All the landlord can recover are its costs and a reasonable sum to cover any reduction in value in the premises or any adjacent premises it owns. These provisions cannot be excluded. The user clause will need careful drafting to promote use by a range of community groups.
- The lease is assigned or under-let to a profit motivated tenant. NHDC will seek to reduce this risk by prohibiting assignment and under-letting, except to other Trustees or an incorporated association for the time being of the tenant. Alternatively, NHDC will seek to include in the lease a clause entitling NHDC to review the rent to the market rental value of the whole property (building, car park and land) should NHDC grant consent to assign or under-let the property to an individual or organisation that is not a Trustee or incorporated association of the tenant. The rent will be reviewed on the date of notice from tenant requesting consent to assign or under-let, and every 5 years thereafter, to market rental value.
- The property is relinquished to NHDC, for example upon the tenant becoming unable to continue operating and surrendering the lease. NHDC will then incur the holding costs of an empty building or be expected to continue the operation. It is likely to prove difficult to find a new tenant willing to take over the operation. If NHDC runs the facility itself, it will incur direct running costs, including labour costs.
- Once the land is leased out, NHDC will forgo utility and not realise capital value from the site until expiry of the contractual term or any statutory continuation of the term. The only opportunities NHDC will have to gain earlier possession are:

- The lease incorporates tenant, landlord or mutual break clauses and the landlord or tenant exercises them.
- The lease contains forfeiture provision and is forfeited by NHDC as landlord.
- The tenant surrenders the lease.

Having said that, there is not presently considered to be significant capital value in the land.

8.11 Should Cabinet provide its decision in principle to grant a leasehold interest to HBC, officers will explore with HBC the feasibility of the proposed leasehold transfer and request a business case. Comprehensive lease heads of terms will be negotiated with HBC. Further, HBC will be expected to clarify issues such as Planning permission, Highway authority consent and so on and update NHDC officers. The outcome will be reported to a future Cabinet meeting seeking final approval to proceed with the leasehold transfer.

8.12 Alternatively, should Cabinet agree to place the matter into abeyance, officers will request HBC obtains pre-application advice from the Planning and Highway authorities on the proposed development. This with a view to reporting back to Cabinet at a later date seeking either:

- (i) A decision in principle to grant a leasehold interest in land at Cadwell Lane to HBC; or
- (ii) To reject the proposal to grant a leasehold interest in the land to HBC with reason(s).

8.13 If the proposal is rejected at the later Cabinet meeting, or indeed at this Cabinet meeting, officers propose to continue discussions with HBC to consider alternative solutions. Such solutions may include:

- Suggest HBC to approach existing community groups of NHDC community buildings to make enquiries about sharing facilities, including the bowling pavilion at Bancroft Recreation Ground.
- Discuss the possible option of HBC seeking a leasehold interest via the CAT policy in the pavilions at Swinburne Recreation Ground and Ransoms Recreation Ground if these buildings become vacant.
- Suggest HBC to identify alternative venues in Hitchin outside NHDC's ownership that they may wish to hire.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Cabinet in exercising its functions has power to consider or receive presentations from members of the public, community groups and outside bodies on matters relating to the District.

9.2 NHDC's Community Asset Transfer policy and NHDC's Asset Disposal policy are applicable to this case.

- 9.3 A sale or a lease of land of more than seven years is regarded as a disposal. The Contract Procurement Rules (Land Transactions) state that “no property or land owned or leased by the Council shall be disposed of to a third party until it has been established that no other directorates of the Council have a need for the property or land, and that the current service area confirms no other requirement for the site.”
- 9.4 Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 General Disposal Consent (England) 2003 allows a Council to dispose of land in any manner it wishes provided that the consideration is the best that can be reasonably obtained unless the Secretary of State consents to the disposal for less than best value for the following reasons:
- (i) The promotion or improvement of economic well-being.
 - (ii) The promotion or improvement of social well-being.
 - (iii) The promotion or improvement of environmental well-being.
- 9.5 A public notice under Section 123 Local Government Act 1972 was placed in two consecutive editions of the local newspaper advertising the proposed disposal of the land. No comments or objections were received by the deadline.
- 9.6 All disposals need to comply with the European Commission's State aid rules. The European Commission's Communication on State aid elements in sales of land and buildings by public authorities (97/C 209/03) provides general guidance on this issue. When disposing of land at less than best consideration authorities are providing a subsidy to the owner, developer and/or the occupier of the land and property, depending on the nature of the disposal. Where this occurs authorities must ensure that the nature and amount of subsidy complies with the State aid rules, particularly if there is no element of competition in the sale process.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. If a lease is granted to HBC, their expression of interest proposes an annual rental income of £500 for NHDC. NHDC will seek to review the rent on an indexed upwards-only basis at 5-yearly intervals.
- 10.2. Leasing out the land will not generate material revenue savings for NHDC despite reducing the area of land at Cadwell Lane maintained by NHDC.
- 10.3 In the event the development on the leased land is left partially complete, there may be an expectation that NHDC either completes the build or demolishes it. Should protections in the lease fail to secure this work is undertaken by the tenant, NHDC will incur capital costs.
- 10.4. If the club house is relinquished to NHDC, NHDC will incur the holding costs of an empty building or be expected to continue the operation itself, incurring direct running costs such as labour costs.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. Although a leasehold transfer of the land at Cadwell Lane presents the potential risks outlined in Section 8 of this report, no leasehold transfer will take place unless a later Cabinet meeting approves the transfer. The present Cabinet is solely being asked to decide whether the expression of interest should be progressed to the next stage of the

CAT policy, put into abeyance or rejected. No material risks are considered to directly emanate from making the decisions sought from this Cabinet.

- 11.2. Please note the risks outlined in Section 8 are not, and should not be inferred to be, reflective of HBC. Having corresponded with HBC on numerous occasions and met several of their Trustees during the course of the last year, the author of this report has witnessed HBC's great level of dedication, professionalism and enthusiasm for providing a club house facility for bridge playing and learning. The author is of the firm opinion HBC will provide NHDC with a strong and reliable tenant covenant strength should they be granted a leasehold interest.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2. Appendix I provides an Equality Analysis.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1. The Social Value Act and "go local" requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 The proposed leasehold transfer involves part of the public recreation land at Cadwell Lane. Appendix H considers the environmental, social and economic benefits of green public open space, providing useful context for the case in hand and setting out the multi-faceted role of such public space, including:

- Importance to the environment, society and local economy;
- Supporting family life;
- Maintaining health and well-being;
- Improving social cohesion;
- Promoting local economic development, investment and tourism;
- Contribution to green infrastructure and complementing existing infrastructure.

The section within Appendix H entitled "History of the open space" focuses specifically on the recreation land at Cadwell Lane and the potential environmental and other impacts that apply to the decisions sought from Cabinet.

- 14.2 An Environmental Impact Assessment has been undertaken – refer to Appendix J. This report has been considered. Should a lease eventually be granted by NHDC to HBC, this will seek to secure adoption by tenant of as many environmentally friendly and green measures as reasonably practicable in the development. These to include measures that:
- Aim to minimise the embodied carbon of the development – for example approving the selection of construction materials or methods with lower whole life carbon footprints or which aid in carbon sequestration;

- Aim to minimise operational energy usage – for example ensuring adoption of renewable energy sources, passive environmental controls and good quality build standards to reduce reliance on more energy-intensive artificial means of moderating the internal temperature and humidity of the development; and
- Aim to harmonise the development within its adjoining environment – for example by requiring incorporation of green and natural landscaping and boundary treatments.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 There are no human resource implications.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix A - Site plan of NHDC's freehold recreation ground.

16.2 Appendix B - Site plan of HBC's proposed lease demise.

16.3 Appendix C - HBC's expression of interest.

16.4 Appendix D - Comments from HBC members on benefits of playing bridge.

16.5 Appendix E - HBC and its relationship with Hitchin, the local and wider community.

16.6 Appendix F - Membership breakdown of HBC.

16.7 Appendix G - HBC during Covid-19 lockdown.

16.8 Appendix H - NHDC's insight on Community Asset Transfer request by HBC.

16.9 Appendix I - Equality Analysis.

16.10 Appendix J - Environmental Impact Assessment.

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

17.1 Christopher Robson, Senior Estates Surveyor christopher.robson@north-herts.gov.uk; ext 4252.

17.2 Andrew Mills, Service Manager Greenspace andrew.mills@north-herts.gov.uk; ext 4272.

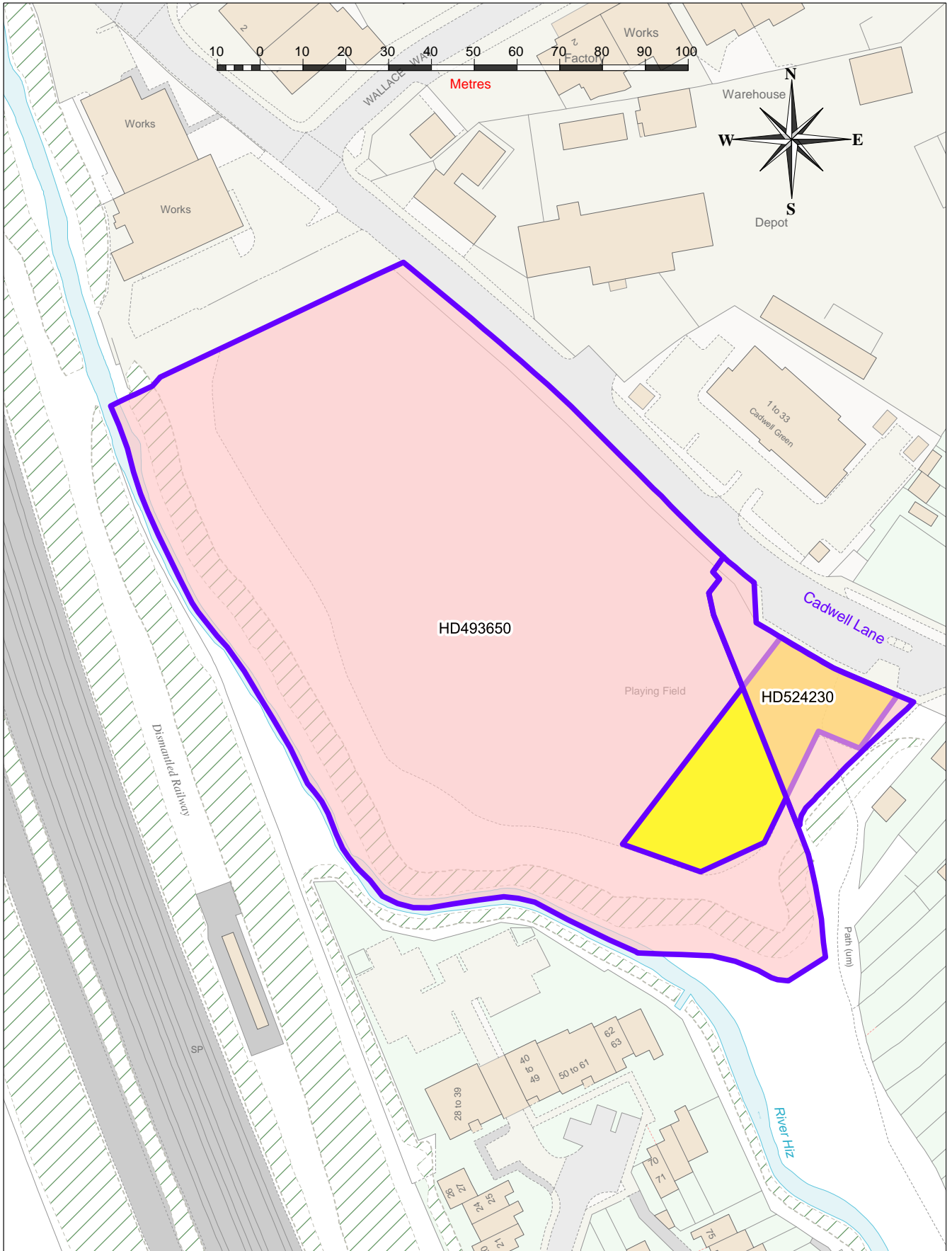
18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 None.

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Site plan of NHDC's freehold recreation ground (area shaded pink and yellow & edged blue)



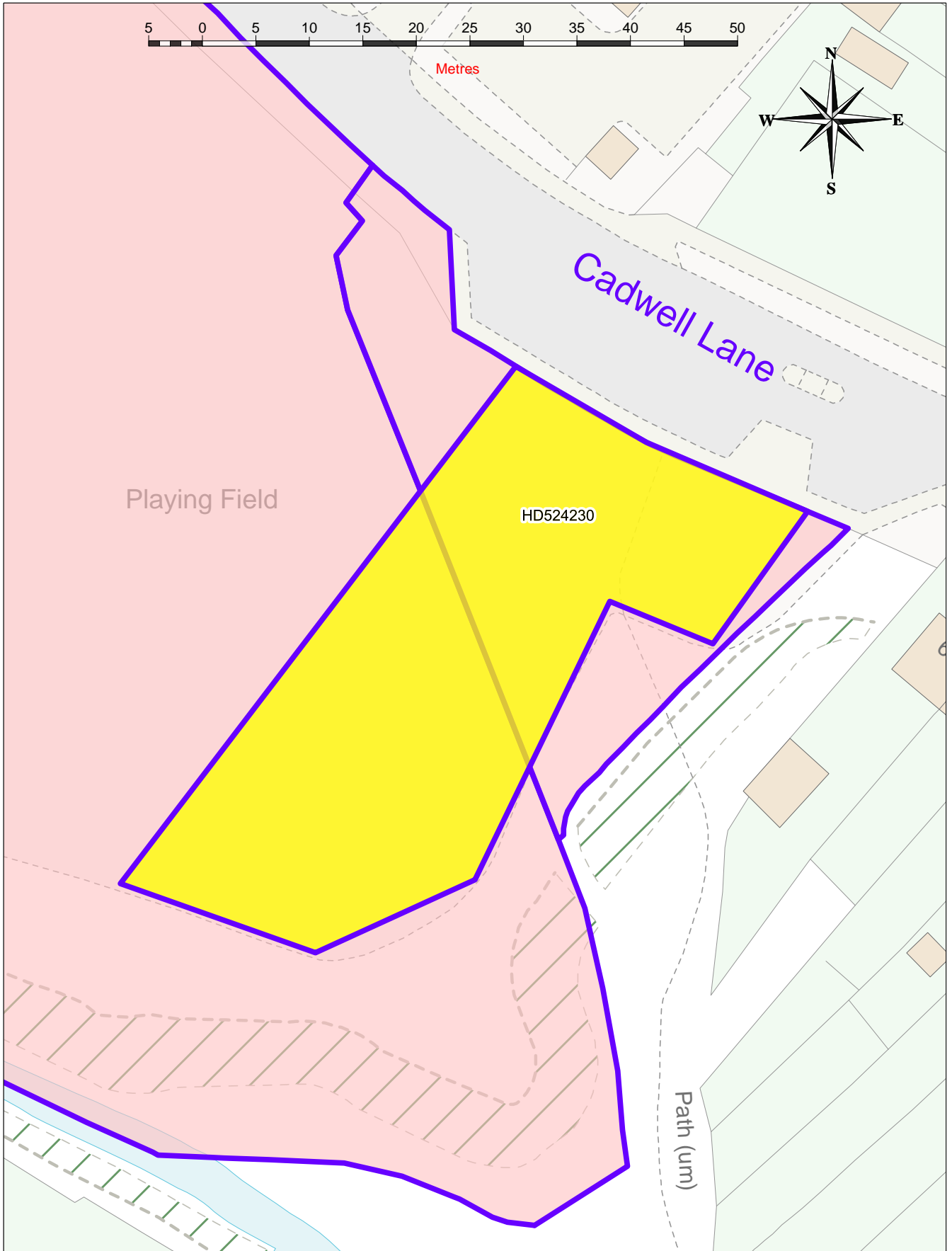
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Site plan of HBC's proposed lease demise (area shaded yellow & edged blue)



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Initial Request and Expression of Interest pursuant to the NHDC Community Asset Transfer Policy.

Applicant- Hitchin Bridge Club – a Charitable Community Organisation (charity number 1140362)

Founded in 2000. In 2011 the club was recognised as a charity in a key decision by the Charities Commission and became the first mind sports organisation ever to achieve this status.

The charity's objects are: -

For the public benefit

(a) the advancement of amateur sport by promoting the game of bridge for the benefit of the residents of Hitchin and the surrounding area.

(b) the provision of facilities for the learning, teaching, and playing of bridge for the benefit of the residents of Hitchin and the surrounding area with the object of improving conditions of life.

The club currently has 260 members from a wide range of backgrounds and drawn from the whole of North Herts, Bedfordshire, and adjoining towns and districts. The latest accounts and annual statement are available on the Charities Commission website. These clearly show prudent and competent management. There are 7 trustees involved in running the club with dozens of other member volunteers. One of the trustees has particular responsibility for keeping in touch with members especially if they are unwell, in hospital, newly bereaved or in need.

Proposal

The club is looking for a suitable site on which to construct a permanent home. The building would be single storey and would primarily comprise a large well-lit and well ventilated open area, usual toilet and kitchen facilities and a small office. It would be intended to incorporate as many energy saving features as possible including solar panels, ground source heating, integral window blinds etc. The club would include broadband, internet, and interactive teaching aids.

There would be the opportunity for other community groups to hire the facilities. These groups could include activities for which the layout of the building would be particularly suited – chess, backgammon, scrabble and other board games, charity bridge drives, meetings, lectures and courses, tutoring and book clubs but these are not intended to be exhaustive and all enquiries would be considered.

The government encourages local authorities to reassess the use of all their assets and it is also the policy of NHDC to engage in a constructive way with community organisations for the benefit of all parties. This proposed project fulfils these objectives.

Funding.

It has been the policy of the club for several years to retain profits for the express purpose of building or leasing a suitable base for its activities. The club currently has £100000 in reserves. The additional cost required would be obtained from grant applications, donations, and loans from members.

Transfer terms

It is appreciated that NHDC would wish to retain the freehold ownership of any suitable land. The club would be happy to agree a long lease at a nominal ground rent.

In a recent conversation with a Council officer the idea was floated that given the low interest rates of borrowed money available to the Council an alternative would be for the Council itself to construct a building on land owned by them and then lease it to the club on a medium term lease at a community rate. That would be acceptable to the club if the Council preferred it.

Community Support.

Obviously all 260 club members are in favour as are the national body of the sport, the English Bridge Union, and its charitable arm EBed (English Bridge Education and Development)

The project also has the support in principle of Martin Stears-Handscomb the leader of NHDC and other Councillors if a suitable site can be located.

Benefits of Playing Bridge

Alleviating Social Isolation and Loneliness.

50% of people over 75 live alone, 1/3 of people over 65 live alone, my generation will spend 1/3 of their lives retired.

Retirement for some is a happy time, to travel, indulge in hobbies, see more of the grandchildren BUT for many others it is anything but happy. It can be a bit like a mini bereavement especially if they already live alone or have limited retirement income. People lose the structure of the working day, the friendship and camaraderie of colleagues (difficult to maintain after retiring), they feel unwanted and worthless. Yet they have much to offer to the community and their potential contributions are often lost.

The Government accepts that social isolation and loneliness is a real and growing problem. It costs the health and social care services a great deal of money and there are clearly considerable financial benefits in reducing its impact. People who lead fulfilling lives in retirement, who have lots of social contacts and engage in meaningful activities are happier, fitter, and healthier.

One way to reduce social isolation and loneliness is to provide facilities where people can meet and make friendships and when this is combined with learning a new skill which keeps you mentally alert and improves concentration so much the better.

The club runs classes for complete beginners and players returning to the game after a long absence whilst concentrating on family and career. It attracts many people at the verge of retirement helping to ease that sometimes difficult change of life.

Mental Stimulation as an aid to preventing or deferring dementia and cognitive decline.

Many studies have shown that stimulating the mind helps reduce the risk of dementia in the older population, aids concentration, memory, logic, and reasoning skills.

People now playing or learning to play whatever their age will be reducing their risk of developing dementia in the future by keeping their minds active, their senses alert and their concentration high every time they play. Bridge is a lifelong learning experience and one that continually stretches and stimulates.

Encouraging players to improve their playing ability, teaching the ethics of the game, partnership co-operation, tolerance, courtesy, and best behaviour at the bridge table are all part of the game. These skills benefit everyone who acquires them, increasing confidence, fostering friendships, and improving interpersonal relationships.

Whilst many other activities offer similar benefits bridge has the edge over sudoku, chess, crosswords, and the like in that it is a partnership game necessitating interaction with others. It can be played at many different levels from purely social and relaxed to the highly competitive.

Providing a sense of community and belonging.

Bridge clubs offer an opportunity for people to make new, often lifelong, supportive friends and create a sense of belonging and identity.

Bridge is a cheap activity. It costs £3 for a player to enjoy company and a stimulating experience lasting over 3 hours. The club has a policy of reducing that to one half for players in full time education or in receipt of any means tested benefit.

Bridge is accessible to disabled players as wheelchairs can easily be accommodated at a bridge table, stationary positions provided for the less mobile member and additional lighting for those with failing eyesight.

Improving mathematical and behavioural skills in the young.

Studies with schoolchildren have shown that playing bridge improves their mathematical skills in numeracy, problem solving, probability, logical reasoning and decision making. It helps children cope with success and defeat and learn that mistakes are a part of life. It also improves their behaviour and interpersonal skills in speaking, listening, rule following, team building, partnership working, tolerance and courtesy.

Pre Covid 19 the club was teaching bridge to primary school children in 2 Hitchin schools. This proved extremely popular with the children and in 2018 a group of year 6 students from Highover School were taken to play a game of bridge at the House of Lords. It is however difficult to introduce bridge to all local primary schools due to the number of volunteers required but with a dedicated building the club could and would intend to run an after school bridge club enabling us to reach and teach children from all parts of the town and surrounding area and to keep the interest of children who have moved onto secondary education.

Benefits of a bridge club to Hitchin.

Members and visitors come from all over the district and from many surrounding towns and villages. We have members who live in East Herts, Bedfordshire, Luton, Cambridgeshire, Three Rivers, Dacorum and Broxbourne.

Open competitions run by the club have in addition attracted players from Northampton, London, Oxford, Essex, and Suffolk and on one occasion Hawaii.

Many of these visitors have discovered Hitchin for the first time by playing at the club, like what they find here and return. Many arrive early, potter round the shops and market, visit coffee shops, eat in local cafes or restaurants or pop into a pub for a post-mortem at the end of the competition.

A secure base for the game will also increase membership. Stamford Bridge Club completed a remarkably similar project (with the support of the Town Council and South Kesteven DC) a few years ago. Before the building was started, they had a membership of 200, it is now over 500 and they are the third best attended clubs in England bringing many welcome visitors to the town.

Members Comments on the Benefits of Playing Bridge

As you are aware, I have a severe hearing problem. Whilst I am well supported at home there is no doubt that I had become socially isolated as a result.

I decided to learn and play bridge purely because of my interest in card/mind games and because I believed that my hearing loss would not be too detrimental to my enjoyment of the activity.

To my surprise and pleasure, I have found that the social interaction involved has also been of great benefit to me. I have made some good friends at Hitchin bridge club with similar interests outside of bridge with whom I now socialise. My wife and I now play bridge socially with people that we were fortunate to meet on the bridge course. To anybody with a severe hearing loss a much improved social life is of great benefit.

I also believe that the activity of bridge in itself is of great benefit to me. A three hour session of duplicate bridge has forced me to concentrate and think hard over a long period of time. I found this difficult at first, but I am sure that my concentration has improved as a result. As dementia runs in my family, I can only draw the conclusion that this "mind workout" will be of benefit to my future health.

Finally, for me, the bridge club is not just about the activity of bridge. The club actually becomes a small community in itself which brings people together in a positive way. (C)

A weekly gathering can be particularly important to those people who, for whatever reason, do not get the chance to spend quality time with other people.

For myself, I enjoy and value the mental stimulus of bridge, but have also met a great many people in different bridge venues throughout the West Midlands and now in and around Hitchin. Playing bridge is an easy way into a community which may otherwise seem very alien when moving to another part of the country. Thank you for your help in this.

Can I tell you about an old bridge partner of mine who lives in Sutton Coldfield? He is in his eighties and has a wife who contracted MS in her forties and has only recently had to go into a local home. He visits her everyday but is lonely at home. So, he has opened his house on Saturday afternoons to new bridge players (mainly old ladies) who need a bit more confidence before tackling the duplicate sessions at the local clubs. He provides bridge, tea, and cakes and by all accounts a very convivial atmosphere. This generous gesture has changed their lives in the same way that bridge clubs can do throughout the country. (J)

After a series of mid-life crises, including my parents' deaths, my husband's suffering from a life-threatening form of lymphoma, a major career crisis and my only child's leaving home, I was suffering from moderate depression.

I needed a new, absorbing interest to stimulate and entertain me, so I took bridge lessons at Hitchin Bridge Club from October 2010 to June 2011. I loved the challenge of learning something new, and have become a very enthusiastic - if not very talented - bridge player. As well as attending club sessions once or twice a week, I play social bridge almost every week with a couple whom I met in my bridge classes. They have become close friends of my husband and me: we have been on holiday together, and I have played at bridge clubs in France and England. I have made other good friends at Hitchin Bridge Club, and I thrive in the Club's friendly and informal atmosphere.

I can't imagine any other activity that would have enhanced my social, intellectual and psychological well-being as much as the experience of learning and playing bridge at Hitchin Bridge Club - it's a lot better for me, and cheaper for the State, than decades on Seroxat! (S)

Four years ago, I retired after an intensive forty year career in local government estates management. Whilst I am lucky enough to have friends and family around me, I suddenly found that life appeared to have stopped. The intensity and long hours of my work had precluded much in the way of hobbies, and I was aware that my mind was stagnating. It was at that point that it was suggested to me that I should learn how to play bridge. Hitchin Bridge Club gave me that opportunity, and whilst I am painfully aware of my limitations in the game, I find it highly stimulating and great fun, opening new doors and friendships to me. (A)

I was diagnosed with cancer in 2007 which meant reducing from full time to part time work before I was ready to. Taking up playing bridge after a gap of 15 years has given me the emotional support needed to cope with the cancer and move from full time work through part time to fully retired. As I now run bridge sessions and support bridge training sessions it has allowed me to use the skills I gained through working and gives me an active and stimulating retirement. (E)

Through learning and playing bridge I have kept my brain active in my old age and made many new friends. Learning to play bridge is an exciting and time consuming experience. I try so hard to remember the many conventions of bridge that I have little time to think about minor ailments. (A)

My husband died over 4 years ago of a brain tumour. While he was very ill, I retired at the age of 60 to be with him and shortly afterwards he died leaving me feeling lonely and depressed. I decided to make some new friends and interests. One of the best things I did was to join the Hitchin Bridge Club where I learnt to play bridge and now attend the club once or twice a week. I have made lots of new friends and we play together in each other's houses and attend various charitable bridge afternoons in addition to club evenings to raise money for good causes. Bridge has been wonderful for me and I would love to see more interest and help in such mind sports from our local councils. (J)

I have greatly enjoyed the company and mental stimulation of playing bridge again while working away from home. It also keeps me out of the pub, which is perhaps more of a reflection on me, but one thing worth emphasising is that it is a relatively cheap occupation.

In terms of the game itself, the combination of high skill levels, coupled with some luck encourages tolerance and a sense of humour in a way that (say) chess does not. Having played both games to a reasonable standard (I was a county first team chess player when younger), I know which is more relaxing. In terms of the benefits for the elderly, my grandmother died at 83 having taught me to play cards, first whist and then bridge, and remained mentally sharp until her final illness. (I)

Since retiring from business I managed to allay the loss of day to day contact with work colleagues by taking on the responsibility of Captain of my local golf club which provided me with the opportunity to use my management experience to keep the club abreast, and indeed ahead of, the current needs towards the social and physical benefits of playing golf.

With advancing years my mobility started to suffer with the onset of arthritis in the knees and I started to look at other ways to maintain social interaction with people of a similar ilk and decided to take up duplicate bridge after many years playing the 'rubber bridge' version of the game.

Since joining the Hitchin Bridge Club, both my wife and I have found that, the social and mental stimulus of playing this most enthralling game has given us an extra impetus to enjoy the latter years of our life. We have both found many new friends amongst the membership of the club and look forward to many years to come. (M & M)

Whilst there is a progressive attitude within government to tackle obesity by encouraging people to engage in some form of exercise to keep the pounds off and lead a healthier lifestyle, it should not be forgotten that mental as well as physical exercise are both equally important - particularly with the seeming increase in mental dementia.

Lest we should forget, the much hackneyed phrase 'Use it or lose it' applies both to mental as well as physical activity. (R)

I am a widower aged 75. When I lost my wife fifteen years ago, I was quite lost because I had depended on her for our social life and I retired soon afterwards. But a friend told me to cheer up and join a bridge club (I had never heard of bridge clubs until then).

She was absolutely right – joining my local bridge club gave me immediate access to a rich social life based on a variety of new friends, some of whom have since become holiday companions (a major issue when you lose your spouse), and all of whom are very supportive often well away from the Club.

For example, my poor eyesight prevents me from driving, but I am always offered a lift to bridge and even more important, to hospital by club members. One group of members regularly visits a lonely member with terminal cancer to cheer her up and provide a little social bridge.

Bridge, for me, has been a real godsend in overcoming the loneliness of widowhood- I just wish more people knew about it. Sadly, we do not get any recognition from the local council. (D)

When we downsized, having retired, we arrived not knowing anyone in the area and decided that it would be fun to be able to have a hobby that we could enjoy together. We saw an advert for the bridge club, and we enrolled in the bridge classes never having played before. Since then and through the club we have made many friends and have seen the club go from strength to strength. Apart from the social aspect of the club we feel that our brains are given a much needed work out something we feel is vital to keeping old age at bay. (T & S)

At all levels and for all ages, Club Bridge provides a challenging intellectual environment in a (hopefully!) friendly social context. This may be especially important for the retired who no longer have the similar rigour and discipline that many jobs provide. For myself, who has been involved in some problematic voluntary work since retiring, it has also sometimes been the essential 'island of sanity' in particularly difficult weeks! (B)

I first came to the club and started lessons three years after my first husband died. I had looked after John at home for over 16 years since his first stroke and I had been rather tied to the house and so I was rather at a loss when he died – in other words my reason for living had been removed. I was encouraged to come to the club by a friend and this was just what I needed. It took me out of the house for a few hours and apart from saying 'good evening' I did not need to enter into deep conversation with anyone if I did not wish to. I had people around me and I could focus on the bridge. I have made many friends since I joined, and I would recommend bridge to anyone who was lonely or depressed. (R)

I am 67 years old and have been a very able and active sportsman all my life. While I am still a regular golfer my age means that I am now unable to participate in those sporting activities that were so much a part of my earlier life.

Recently I started playing bridge at the Hitchin Bridge Club and I now pretty well get the same enjoyment from bridge that I used to get when I was playing soccer, hockey, cricket, tennis, squash, badminton etc in my younger days. Just as I used to nervously look forward to playing those sports of my youth, I now have that same feeling before my bridge night. I have a team member to play with and opposition to play against. I am able to plan with my partner a means to beat or defend against the opposition and then try to put those plans into action. I need to be flexible to vary my approach should something change during each game and I need to be quick in response to such demands. Of course, those earlier sports required the thought process and the physical application, now it is the mind game and a different type of application.

Bridge and the other sports I mentioned have many similarities. Bridge is like golf, because it too enables me to play with and against players of vastly differing ages, abilities, from all walks of life and of both sexes. All bridge players are using the game as the medium for keeping their minds active while at the same time enjoying themselves in the company of others.

I would be the first to admit that I am not the best bridge player, but I do my best and I still try to win. I always was a competitive being! Like my earlier sporting engagements though, it is not a win at all costs attitude, but it is just great to be involved in a pastime that gives me an opportunity to pit myself against others and at the end of the game it is still good to shake the hands of my opponents. I love it! (M)

Although advancing years and declining mobility tend to restrict our physical activities, we find that the challenges of learning and playing bridge are extremely helpful in exercising our brains and keeping us mentally alert. Just as importantly, through bridge we have developed a number of new friendships at a time in our lives when this has become less easy to do. (P & P)

I am a firm believer in "use it or lose it" and I also remember reading articles and watching documentaries about faster brain shrinkage when not used than when actively used. I hope bridge playing will stop/delay the onset of Alzheimer's.

Bridge playing helps people to socialise and make friends. I have made so many friends through playing in local clubs and going on bridge holidays. I cannot imagine life without bridge especially during the lockdown. The online bridge has helped me stay connected with people worldwide and continue to exercise my brains. It has kept my sanity. (A)

I found that starting playing bridge again after many years has helped with getting me to be more organised, keep to my time contracts, getting space awareness enhanced and from the social side I have really enjoyed meeting other likeminded people. With the virus situation and your online bridge that you organised, the list of benefits can go on and on. Keeping in touch, feeling less isolated, filling in time. (L)

I decided to learn to play bridge in 2012. My health was in decline - in particular, cognitive function was affected - and I realised retirement was imminent. My work, following my husband's death and the children leaving home, had become my life and the hole left by retirement was enormous. Bridge has proved a great replacement. It provides mental challenge, motivation, good company, and structure to the week. (C)

I have found bridge to be an absolute lifeline since the death of my husband. I had appreciated the mental and social benefits before but in bereavement those benefits have meant even more to me. I think that in times of anxiety, stress, grief, and coronavirus having a routine is vital. Making a commitment to play regularly with a partner is one way of providing some routine. Being a part of a community is also important, as was very evident at Rodger O'Reilly's funeral. In playing, of course,

one has to concentrate and as well as stimulating the brain it does break the cycle of repetitive anxious thoughts and the self-absorption that can so easily develop when living alone. I do have interests other than bridge!!! Nevertheless, I do feel that bridge is essential for my mental wellbeing. Socially, as a bonus I have made some lovely friendships. (P)

I moved to the area from the Midlands 11 months ago, not knowing many people locally, and started to come to the Hitchin Bridge Club in October last year.

Although I have played bridge at a basic level on and off for many years, I have found it to be stimulating and thought provoking to start to learn to play at a much more advanced level. It is a game that tests the memory and gives scope for developing and to put into practice strategies to succeed. There also seem to be almost limitless ways to learn, work on and improve the way you play and interact with a number of different partners. For someone who has now retired it is great to have an opportunity to develop new skills and to exercise the brain cells.

I have got to know a number of people in the area who I now count as good friends. I was fortunate to join the club some months before the lockdown, to start to get to know people in the club and to have the chance to access some of the very good training sessions, led by Richard Jones, before the coronavirus lockdown got in the way. The online bridge sessions available, both those organised as tournaments by the club and social relaxed games between members of the club, have been a real help in getting through the social isolation that could otherwise have been felt during this difficult time. They have helped me to get to know club members better and to extend the range of people from the club that I now interact with. (A)

Learning to play was a great opportunity to try something new, learn a skill, have fun and keep my brain ticking over. Having organised lessons not only made this easier than trying from a book or website, but also gives an opportunity to make friends and realising there are other people equally as stumped as I was at first is an encouragement to keep going. It is also a lifelong learning opportunity and an ongoing challenge; I am still in the valley looking up at first base camp while the distant summit is hidden in the clouds - but another benefit is that you can play at whatever level suits the individual, socially or in a more competitive environment.

Through the club and the lessons, I have made some real friends (and will no doubt make more) and have a widened social group of friendly diverse people with a shared interest. This is also true of other people I meet or already know, where bridge has become another link or topic of conversation.

It is also a relatively cheap pastime, so is open to a wide range of people on different incomes. (C)

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Hitchin Bridge Club and its relationship with Hitchin, the local and wider community.

The club is affiliated to the English Bridge Union, the governing body of the game and also to the county association Hertfordshire Bridge. One of the youngest clubs in the county it started in 2000 with a group of 8 players, has grown over the years and now has 268 members. It is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (charity number 1140362).

The club has a website – hitchinbridgeclub.org.uk and Twitter and Facebook accounts.

It believes in being an important part of the town and is very much involved in the Hitchin community and supports activities in the town whenever it can.

Members dressed as the King of Spades and Queen of Hearts ran in one of the annual pancake races,

Members regularly take part in the annual Big Hitchin Tidy Ups.

Stalls in the market square with members playing bridge have been part of several community open days.

Last year we joined in the Hitchin Library's new community event promoting clubs and local societies.

For several years, the club ran a fun Café Bridge event as part of the Hitchin Festival involving restaurants in Sun Street and Bucklersbury with Bridge HQ at the Sun Hotel. All profits (usually about £350) went to the Hitchin Initiative and it brought welcome business to the participating restaurants.

The club intended to enter the soapbox derby in 2020 but Covid 19 has prevented that.

The club runs Children in Need Sims Pairs competitions in November each year usually raising £800, hosts a special charity bridge event each year, donates its used cards to local social groups, Christmas boxes and African children, and collects stamps for the Orkney RLNI. Members sell homemade jams, chutneys, honey, handmade greetings cards and garden produce for charity to other members.

The club is a member of the Hitchin Forum.

As the club was the first mind sports organisation to obtain charitable status the chairman has assisted many other bridge and chess clubs with their applications for charitable status on a pro bono basis over the last few years. She has also helped bridge clubs find funding for equipment from Awards for All and helped with their applications.

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Breakdown of membership Hitchin Bridge club

The club has currently 268 members. You might find it useful to see the breakdown into areas by postcodes.

Hitchin – SG3, SG4, SG5

108 members of which 72 are from Hitchin town and the other 36 are from nearby Hitchin villages

– St Ippolyts, Ickleford, Little Wymondley, Knebworth, Whitwell, Pirton, Shillington, Higham Gobion, Offley, Holwell, Kimpton, Codicote, Stotfold., Weston.

Letchworth – SG6

25 members

Stevenage – SG1, SG2.

24 members

Royston/Baldock - SG7, SG8, SG9.

Royston, Baldock, Ashwell, Hinxworth, Buntingford, Anstey.

14 members

Mid Herts – Hertford, Ware, Watton at Stone – SG12, SG13, SG14

5 members.

Bedfordshire villages – SG16, SG17, SG18, SG19.

Lower Stondon, Shefford, Clifton, Biggleswade, Meppershall, Northill, Langford, Wrestlingworth, Sandy.

29 members

Bedford and area – MK40, MK41, MK45

Bedford, Flitwick, Maulden, Haynes, Barton le Clay, Sharpenhoe, Flitton.

16 members

Luton and Dunstable – LU 1, LU2, LU3, LU4, LU6

13 members

St Albans/Harpenden/Welwyn/WGC – AL1, AL3, AL4, AL5, AL6, AL8

18 members

North London – EN10, EN4, EN6, EN9

Broxbourne, Cuffley, Cockfosters, Nazeing.

6 members

And a handful from the rest of the country

Cheshire, Moreton in Marsh, Abbots Langley, Epping, Foster Street, Saffron Walden, Boston, Edgeware, Spain

10 members

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Hitchin Bridge Club during lockdown.

The club's AGM for the year ending 2019 was on 16th March and immediately afterwards the country went into a national lockdown.

It was apparent that this was an end to face to face bridge for quite a while and action needed to be taken to keep members connected and mentally fit.

By the end of April, the club had launched a virtual bridge club, and this has grown from one weekly session initially to seven each week with other occasional monthly sessions and more planned. Last week saw the club host 97 tables of bridge (that is 388 individuals playing the game).

The sessions cover all levels of ability from the very relaxed to the highly competitive.

The club also recognised that other smaller local clubs did not have the critical mass to move online and as a result created an open session for all bridge players. Members from Royston, Letchworth and Stevenage bridge clubs are now able to enjoy an online game. This initiative also brought in players from wider afield and 20 new members joined the club taking our membership to 280.

This particular session is earmarked as a charity event with all profits usually going to the Letchworth Garden House Hospice. It is anticipated that by Christmas over £4000 will have been raised for the hospice. For Children in Need week the profit went to CIN, 120 bridge players took part in that one session and £717 was sent to the charity.

In addition, one trustee is running a zoom morning game for small groups of players who want to continue learning and improving. She is also regularly phoning members particularly those living alone for a friendly chat and to check on their wellbeing.

By temporarily moving online the club has helped members to remain mentally active and to keep in touch with friends and partners. **BUT** they all miss the social aspect of physically getting together to compete with friends around a bridge table. The benefits of social interaction in preventing loneliness and isolation have become even more apparent during this pandemic and should not be underestimated.

The creation and success of our virtual club in the very unusual circumstances in which we are now living shows the club is able and willing to adapt and respond quickly and effectively to the needs of its members and the wider bridge and general community.

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Community Asset Transfer Request by Hitchin Bridge Club

Location – Cadwell Lane Public Open Space

Why is Greenspace Important?

Greenspace is important component to create a balance between the urban and rural environments found in North Hertfordshire and has been recognised as having an essential role for the “quality of life” found in the District which is through

1. Promoting healthier communities and reducing health inequalities
2. Enabling children and young people to develop social skills, test their boundaries, explore and learn about nature and wildlife
3. Improving the life chances of people living the more deprived areas
4. Creating safer and stronger communities
5. Improving the image of and pride in the different settlements
6. Creating cleaner and greener communities
7. Enhancing biodiversity
8. Mitigating and adapting to climate change
9. Recognising the value of the historic environment
10. Avoiding, managing and reducing flood risk.

For centuries public parks and open spaces have played an important part in the social and civic life of communities. From pocket parks in local neighbourhoods, country parks on the periphery of towns, to large civic parks at the heart of city centres, public parks are deeply rooted in the physical fabric, spirit and identity of thousands of places across the UK.

Central to Family Life

Some of our earliest childhood memories include visits to local parks. Socially, parks offer opportunities to rest and meet friends, for children and young people to play, to hold events, to pass through on the way to work, to exercise and take time out from the pressures of everyday life. Other reports also acknowledge the importance of parks to children. Making Britain Great for Children and Families – a manifesto launched by 4Children, the national charity working towards a more integrated approach to children’s services – includes better provision of parks in its list of ways to create good places for children to grow up in.

Supporting Health and Happiness

Parks have a positive effect on people’s wellbeing and the health of their neighbourhoods. Evidence from the University of Exeter’s European Centre for Environment and Human Health, published by the Association for Psychological Science⁷, reveals that people who live in greener urban areas report greater wellbeing and lower levels of mental stress than city dwellers without nearby parks and gardens. An increase in visitor numbers, particularly in urban parks, was recorded by Natural England in their annual Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) surveys. In 2012–13 there were fewer visits to the countryside and a significant increase in visits to green spaces in towns and cities. This points to the growing importance of parks as the only place some people encounter nature. The State of the Nation’s Waistline report, published by the National Obesity Forum, states that over 25% of adults in England are considered obese. By 2050 the figure is expected to rise to 50%. Parks provide vital health resources that help to support healthy populations. Their value to

public health is emphasised in Public Health and Landscape, a recent position statement by the Landscape Institute, which demonstrates parks are a key ingredient in creating healthy places.

Improving Social Cohesion

Recent research highlights that “there is good evidence suggesting that the natural environment contributes to social cohesion. This appears to be particularly the case for well-maintained green spaces”. An example from Chicago suggests that parks can actively promote “inter-community relations in a way which is almost unique in urban life”. A Joseph Rowntree report notes that, as communities across the UK become increasingly mixed and diverse, local social amenities will become more and more important. Public parks offer one of the most important social spaces in a neighbourhood, but, as interviews in the research highlight, their condition is a key issue, as poor-quality parks can have a detrimental effect on cohesion.

Promoting Local Economic Development

Public parks have been used throughout history to promote investment and growth. Developers frequently use the proximity of parks to attract investors. A study on improving the competitiveness of England's core cities notes that “soft location factors are an increasingly important part of economic decision-making”. Good-quality parks and public spaces contribute to these factors, which help to attract and retain skilled workers and their families. Forward-looking cities with a good environment and easy access to natural amenities are working at preserving and improving them. They know that for skilled employees “the quality of life for themselves and their families is an increasingly important factor” of location. Recent research from Natural England draws together a growing evidence base on ways the natural environment, including parks, can enhance the economic competitiveness of a particular region and increase employee productivity. Good parks also boost the tourist economy. Visit Britain has found that, of the 31 million tourists visiting Britain, over a third enjoy visiting a park or garden, making it one of the most popular activities (ranking above visiting a museum, castle, historic house or art gallery). Clissold Park, a local neighbourhood park in the London Borough of Hackney, receives the same number of annual visitors as London's National Portrait Gallery, and more than St Paul's Cathedral (2.1 million, 2.1 million and 1.8 million visitors respectively). Investing in parks is a recognised way of helping to regenerate and revitalise an area. There are economic indicators to show this works, and strong evidence of the impact of parks in protecting and enhancing land and property values. The presence of a well maintained park has been shown through research by CABI Space to add on average a 5% to 7% premium on house prices. Equally, a declining park has the opposite effect.

At a local level we need only look at the increased visitor numbers to Letchworth Garden City following the refurbishment work to Howard Park & Gardens.

Delivering Environmental Services

Parks are a key component of the ‘green infrastructure’ of towns and cities, complementing the heavily engineered and costly ‘grey infrastructure’ of roads, utilities and sewerage systems. Properly planned, attractive green networks of parks, green spaces and river corridors provide natural systems and ecological services that collect and clean water, improve air quality and reduce peak summer temperatures. There is increasing interest in parks’ ability

to improve the resilience of neighbourhoods to the impacts of climate change. The Forestry Commission shows that trees in towns can help reduce the urban heat island effect by up to 7oC. As trees and plants grow, they take in carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Parks also provide biodiversity hotspots. The qualities of an ecologically rich functional landscape were built into London's Olympic Park at the outset. As the UK's newest large public park, it not only provided an attractive and dramatic setting for the London 2012 Games but also continues to reduce flood risk, store surface water, and accommodate a rich diversity of plant and animal species.

History of the open space

Cadwell Lane Public Open Space (POS) lies on the edge of the Wilbury Way Industrial Est on the edge of Hitchin. The open space is bordered on two side by residential dwellings consisting of a block of flats and 1930's style semidetached housing. On one side is an industrial unit with car parking to the front currently being used as a mechanics workshop and on the other is an embankment leading down to the River Hiz.

This site is also known to have been a former land fill site in the past.

The POS also contains a single adult football pitch that has been historically used by the Hitchin Sunday Football League.

The site of the community asset transfer is focused on an area that formally a football pavilion was located upon.

This pavilion was constructed out of prefabricated concrete sections with a single door in and out of the structure with a pebble dash textured exterior finish and few windows which were small at a high level and due to vandalism the glass has been replaced with reinforced polycarbonate sheeting which had turned opaque over time. The structure was of low quality and had become a focus for graffiti and anti-social behaviour.

At the time the pavilion was demolished the Hitchin Sunday League vigorously contested the decision which was eventually upheld by the Local Government Ombudsman. The decision to demolish the Cadwell pavilion was part of a District Wide strategic approach to rationalise the provision of football facilities throughout North Herts. The strategic aim was to acknowledge the demand for football pavilions but under the context of budget constraints it was no longer possible to continue investing in a poorly constructed building that only supported a single football pitch. The intention is to use proposed S106 funding from future developments to construct a purpose-built pavilion at Walsworth Common, Hitchin – less than half a mile from Cadwell Lane POS – on a site with 4 pitches with a brand-new building. As such this would reduce the burden on the existing out of date, poor quality pavilions leading up to the pre-emptive demolition of Cadwell Lane pavilion.

The POS is located adjacent the River Hiz and due to its location forms part of the string of Local Nature Reserves and habitat locations known locally as the Purwell Valley. This linear biodiversity corridor consists of Purwell Ninesprings (Owned by Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust), Purwell Meadows, Walsworth Common, Cadwell Lane POS and Burymead Springs. Except for Purwell Ninesprings all are owned and managed by North Herts District Council.

Historically the maintenance of the Cadwell Lane POS has focused upon the single football pitch. However, since the demolition of the pavilion and with the emerging Purwell Valley concept attention has focused towards the adjacent River Hiz and the enhancement of biodiversity this POS can support. The Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) provides greater detail and can be found on the NHDC web site at

<https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/parks-and-open-spaces/green-space-management-strategy-and-action-plans>

Research into the topography, diversity and habitats found at Cadwell Lane POS for the GAP found that the site is adjacent a chalk stream (River Hiz) and is a significant corridor for wildlife connecting adjacent Local Nature Reserves at Burymead Springs and Purwell Meadows via Walsworth Common. External grant funding and resourcing from North Herts District Council enabled the implementation of the action plans within the GAP. This work included the improvement of access of footpaths from the POS to the river with resurfacing, introduction of signage and interpretation, thinning of tree canopies to allow more light to the river, planting of a hedge and implementing alterations to the management of the grassland headlands around the football pitch. The Cadwell Lane POS is now within the second-generation GAP which builds upon the works completed to date and is now focusing upon the strengthening of links within its neighbouring sites of environmental importance.

It's also worth noting that the location of the former pavilion is also a known location for Japanese Knotweed that requires regular treatment to contain it.

Hitchin Bridge Club - Greenspace Perspective

Historically Hitchin Bridge Club used the pavilion within Bancroft Recreation Ground, Hitchin as their base for meetings etc. The renovation project of Bancroft Recreation Ground included the demolition of the Community Hall and conversion of the area into greenspace within the site. This was not received positively by the Hitchin Bridge Club who vigorously objected to the proposal despite the existing pavilion been in a very poor condition and not fit for purpose. At the time it was identified that there was an excess of community space for hire within Hitchin and that it would be possible for the Hitchin Bridge Club to easily relocate and use more appropriate facilities in the future. In addition, this situation would be further enhanced with the development and opening of Hitchin Town Hall.

It is understood that the Hitchin Bridge Club wish to secure a specific venue dedicated to their activities and have focused upon the locations vacated by the demolition of former football pavilions including Walsworth Common and St John's Recreation Ground also both in Hitchin.

The pavilion at St John's Recreation Ground was located immediately adjacent a community centre and it has been suggested that Hitchin Bridge Club may want to approach the community centre with the view to hiring the venue as appropriate. It appears that this option has been discounted by the Hitchin Bridge Club in favour of their proposals at Cadwell Lane.

Community Asset Transfer Request by Hitchin Bridge Club – Community engagement team view

Hitchin Bridge Club were based at Bancroft Hall which was demolished in 2016.

Since then they moved to the Church Hall, Our Lady's and St Andrew Church, 16 Nightingale Road.

Prior to the Coronavirus pandemic they advertised sessions at lunch time and evening on Monday's and Wednesday's and Thursday and Friday evenings.

Meeting times:

Monday and Wednesday afternoons at 1.30 p.m. every week.

Monday, Wednesday and Thursdays evenings at 7.30pm. every week

Teams of 4 on 2nd Friday of each month.

Hitchin Bridge Club (a registered charity) promotes and encourages the playing of duplicate bridge in the town. It offers courses for complete beginners and support for improvers.

All sessions apart from Thursday are suitable for all abilities. Thursday's evenings are intended for improvers and inexperienced players. (only simple systems permitted).

Supervised play sessions are also held on Monday afternoons separately from the main playing sessions.

A host is usually available on Monday evening, Wednesday afternoon and Thursday evening so players can attend those sessions without a partner.

The club also offers a series of workshops for players wishing to improve their bridge skills.

Ref: Herts County Council website

The Hitchin Bridge Club is registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)

They state in their annual accounts 2019 that they have 250 members and this number has remained stable for quite a few years.

It is my understanding that the club have been looking for alternative premises for many years as they would like to have sole use of a building.

There are many other venues around the town, Community Centres, Scout Huts, Church Halls.

The community centres are owned but not operated by North Hertfordshire District Council.

These include: Walsworth Community Centre, St Michael's Mount Community Centre, St John's Community Centre and Westmill Community Centre.

In addition, there is the Hitchin Town Hall that has a large hall plus smaller meeting room for hire.

These venues have been suggested to the club, but these were rejected as they would not be able to have sole use.

Officers are unclear why sole use is required as they currently don't use their current location 100% of the time. However, as it seems that this is their desire then it should not be the responsibility of the local authority to provide a venue for this single use.

Alternative Options

The strategic direction of football provision has always focused upon developing Walsworth Common as the focus for the sport. This would then enable the contraction of satellite facilities from around Hitchin to be withdrawn. This in turn would be supported by S106 contributions to build a purpose-built facility at Walsworth Common to replace the lost pavilion provision. It has also been proposed that this new build could be a community building that could serve a wider community audience.

The Hitchin Bridge Club used a former Community Hall at Bancroft Recreation Ground, and it is not known if they have approached other existing Community Halls to relocate their activities to. There, is already, an established Community Centre at Walsworth and another at St Michael's, not to mention the previously noted facility at St John's Recreation Ground all within Hitchin.

If the development of a new pavilion progresses at Walsworth Common using S106 funding this would lead to the demolition of two existing buildings at Swinburne Recreation Ground and Ransoms Recreation Ground. Once vacated one of these buildings could be acquired by the Hitchin Bridge Club to convert to their needs – therefore negating the need and expense of building a specific building and also losing valuable greenspace from public access. The potential of repurposing the pavilion at Ransoms Rec has also been realised by the Triangle Garden Association at Ransoms who already occupy half the existing pavilion. Therefore, there is a potential option for a joint venture between the Hitchin Bridge Club and the Triangle Garden regarding the area currently used as a football pavilion should Walsworth be developed.

As previously highlighted above the Hitchin Bridge Club used the Community Hall in Bancroft Recreation Ground for their activities before the building was removed. The Bancroft Bowls Pavilion remains and is used by the bowlers throughout the summer. Again, it is not known if the Hitchin Bridge Club have approached the bowlers to explore a joint venture to share the building for both groups in the future.

Future Options


- 1 Grant the community asset transfer and lose the greenspace at Cadwell Lane and incur the negative impacts as detailed above both locally and further afield.
- 2 Refuse the community asset transfer but offer alternatives
 - a. Assist the Hitchin Bridge Club to approach existing Community Groups to make enquiries about sharing facilities
 - b. Delay a decision until Swinburn Rec and Ransoms Rec Pavilions are vacated
 - c. Assist Hitchin Bridge Club to approach the bowlers at Bancroft Recreation Ground
 - d. Assist Hitchin Bridge Club to identify alternative venues in Hitchin that they could hire
- 3 Refuse the community asset transfer and close the proposal.

Equality Analysis Template

1. Name of activity:	Proposal to lease out circa 0.35 acres of 4.19 acre public recreation ground at Cadwell Lane, Hitchin.			
2. Main purpose of activity:	To facilitate construction of clubhouse and surface car park by Hitchin Bridge Club (prospective tenant).			
3. List the information, data or evidence used in this assessment:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document entitled "Community Asset Transfer Request by Hitchin Bridge Club" (<i>source: NHDC's Place Directorate</i>). Expression of interest and related information (<i>source: Hitchin Bridge Club</i>). 			
4. Assessment				
Characteristics	Neutral (x)	Negative (x)	Positive (x)	<p>Describe the person you are assessing the impact on, including identifying: community member or employee, details of the characteristic if relevant, e.g. mobility problems/particular religion and why and how they might be negatively or positively affected.</p> <p>Negative: What are the risks?</p> <p>Positive: What are the benefits?</p>
<p>Community considerations (i.e. applying across communities or associated with rural living or Human Rights)</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Negative</p> <p><i>Development of the clubhouse and car park will represent a loss of circa 8.5% of the public open space at Cadwell Lane. This will reduce the area of land available for sport and recreational use by the community and loss of a green space. Given the limited availability of alternative recreational green space in the vicinity due to the area being predominated by commercial users, this is considered to constitute a negative impact on the health and well-being of nearby residents, particularly those without access to private garden space.</i></p> <p><i>Having said that, no comments or objections have been received in response to a public notice that NHDC placed in The Comet newspaper informing the public of the proposed lease disposal of the land.</i></p> <p><i>The proposed development yields several benefits for the community. These include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Enables Hitchin Bridge Club to continue delivering its charitable objects and expand their reach within the community. This promotes wider interaction, builds connections and friendships and allows more people to engage in mentally stimulating activity in the form of bridge. Such activity will help combat health and social issues of isolation, loneliness and dementia.</i>

				<p><i>On balance, because the land once developed is irreplaceable, whereas the new facility could conceivably be provided elsewhere (for example potentially at the existing pavilions of Swinburne Recreation Ground and Ransoms Recreation Ground), the negative impacts of the development are considered to outweigh the positives.</i></p> <p>Positive</p>
A person living with a disability	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Negative</p> <p>Positive</p>
A person of a particular race	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Negative</p> <p>Positive</p>
A person of a gay, lesbian or bisexual sexual orientation	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Negative</p> <p>Positive</p>
A person of a particular sex, male or female, including issues around pregnancy and maternity	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Negative</p> <p>Positive</p>
A person of a particular religion or belief	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Negative</p> <p>Positive</p>
A person of a particular age	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<p>Negative</p> <p>Positive</p> <p><i>As outlined above under “Community considerations”, the development will help combat health and social issues of isolation, loneliness and dementia. Although these issues can be experienced across all members of the community, elderly people – particularly those who are widowed – are considered more likely than other groups to be exposed to such issues.</i></p> <p><i>Whilst the existing public recreation ground also offers opportunity for elderly people to meet friends and reduce isolation and</i></p>

				<p>loneliness, it is reasonable to believe that a proportion of elderly people would avoid venturing out to the recreation ground alone due to concerns of anti-social behaviour and health-related issues of being exposed to the weather. The prospect of meeting friends at a safe and warm indoor facility offered by the development is considered more inviting to the elderly.</p> <p>Therefore, the development is considered to offer a particular positive for elderly people.</p> <p>The counter-argument is that by reducing the size of the public recreation ground this is particularly detrimental to young people as they tend to engage more in sports and enjoy the associated health and fitness benefits. Hitchin Bridge Club inform that the activity of bridge promotes the improvement of mathematical and behavioural skills for people, but particularly children and adolescents. The development proposed will foster this benefit by creating a stable and conducive facility for the playing and teaching of bridge. This benefit is considered to temper the negative impact on young people of losing part of the recreation ground.</p>				
Transgender	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Negative</td> </tr> <tr> <td> </td> </tr> <tr> <td>Positive</td> </tr> <tr> <td> </td> </tr> </table>	Negative		Positive	
Negative								
Positive								
5 Results								
	Yes	No						
Were positive impacts identified?	X	<input type="checkbox"/>						
Are some people benefiting more than others? If so explain who and why.	X	<input type="checkbox"/>		<p>People of a particular age (predominantly the elderly and young). The proposed development yields particular health and social benefits to these groups. This reflects a value judgement dependent on perspective.</p>				
Were negative impacts identified (what actions were taken)	X	<input type="checkbox"/>		<p>To help mitigate the loss of part of the public recreation ground, NHDC will seek to incorporate a clause in the lease requiring Hitchin Bridge Club to abide by a service level agreement or management agreement appended to the lease. This will require all reasonable endeavours to be made by the tenant to allow other community groups use of all or part of the facility for community purposes. A suitable minimum period of time for which hiring out should take place, and the time periods during which this should happen, would be included in the agreement.</p>				

6. Consultation, decisions and actions			
If High or very high range results were identified who was consulted and what recommendations were given?			
<i>The public have been consulted on the proposed lease disposal of the land by way of a public notice placed by NHDC in two consecutive editions of The Comet newspaper. The notice invited comments or objections to the proposal but none have been received.</i>			
Describe the decision on this activity			
<i>Three options are to be presented to Cabinet on 26th January 2021. Cabinet's decision as to which option to select is sought. These options are:</i>			
<i>(1) To seek Cabinet's decision in principle to grant a leasehold interest in land at Cadwell Lane, Hitchin to Hitchin Bridge Club; or</i>			
<i>(2) To seek Cabinet's agreement to place the matter into abeyance until Hitchin Bridge Club obtains pre-application advice from the local Planning authority and Highway authority on their proposed development at Cadwell Lane; or</i>			
<i>(3) To reject the proposal to grant a leasehold interest in the land to Hitchin Bridge Club with reason(s).</i>			
List all actions identified to address/mitigate negative impact or promote positively			
Action	Responsible person		Completion due date
<i>Subject to the decision of Cabinet, a lease between NHDC and Hitchin Bridge Club will be agreed in due course formalising their use of the leased property and setting out obligations and expectations to help ensure the facility is open to the community for reasonable periods of time. This will help mitigate the negative impact of loss of part of the public recreation ground at Cadwell Lane.</i>	<i>NHDC's Senior Estates Surveyor.</i>		<i>June 2022 (estimated)</i>
When, how and by whom will these actions be monitored?			
<i>NHDC's Senior Estates Surveyor by negotiating a lease between NHDC and Hitchin Bridge Club over the next 12 – 18 months (estimated timeframe), subject to Cabinet deciding to pursue a lease of the land.</i>			
7. Signatures			
Assessor			
Name: Christopher Robson		Signature** <i>C G Robson</i>	
Validated by			
Name: Steven Crowley		Signature** 	
Forward to the Corporate Policy Team			
Signature** <i>Reuben Ayavoo</i>			
Assessment date: <i>06/01/2021</i>		Review date: <i>June 2022</i>	

**** Please type your name to allow forms to be sent electronically.**

A copy of this form should be forwarded to the corporate policy team and duplicate filed on the council's report system alongside any report proposing a decision on policy or service change.

Environmental Implications assessment

1. Name of activity:	Proposal to lease out circa 0.35 acres of 4.19 acre public recreation ground at Cadwell Lane, Hitchin.				
2. Main purpose of activity:	To facilitate construction of clubhouse and surface car park by Hitchin Bridge Club (prospective tenant).				
3. List the information, data or evidence used in this assessment:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document entitled "Community Asset Transfer Request by Hitchin Bridge Club" (source: NHDC's Place Directorate). • Expression of interest and related information (source: Hitchin Bridge Club). 				
Area of Potential Impact	Examples to Consider (non-exhaustive)	Neutral (X)	Negative (X)	Positive (X)	<p>Describe the contribution/impact on the area that the decision may have - assess whether this impact is a negative or positive or neutral one.</p> <p>Negative: What are the risks?</p> <p>Positive: What are the benefits?</p>
1. Impact on greenhouse emission and support adaption to the effects of climate change	<p>Will energy needs be met through renewable sources?</p> <p>Will it reduce emissions through retrofitting new technology?</p> <p>Will it reduce greenhouse gas emissions by reducing energy consumption and the need to travel?</p>		X		<p>Negative</p> <p>The use of the clubhouse once built will necessitate consumption of energy to power appliances that will regulate the internal temperature, humidity and occupier comfort. Depending on the energy source, the use may therefore generate new greenhouse gas emissions.</p> <p>Lease terms will seek to secure adoption by tenant of as many environmentally friendly and green measures as reasonably practicable</p>

				<p><i>in the development. These to include measures that:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Aim to minimise operational energy usage and carbon emissions – for example ensuring adoption of renewable energy sources such as solar panels, passive environmental controls and good quality build standards to reduce reliance on artificial more energy-intensive forms of controlling the internal temperature and humidity of the clubhouse.</i>
				Positive
				Negative
<p><i>2. Use of natural resources including water and energy</i></p>	<p>Will it reduce water consumption?</p> <p>Will it reduce energy consumption?</p>		X	<p><i>Construction of the clubhouse and car park will require natural resources, some of which (for example glass and concrete) will carry embodied carbon from their sourcing, manufacture, construction, installation and transportation.</i></p> <p><i>Lease terms will seek to secure adoption by tenant of as many environmentally friendly and green measures as reasonably practicable</i></p>

				<p><i>in the development. These to include measures that:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Aim to minimise the embodied carbon of the development – for example approving the selection of construction materials or methods with lower whole life carbon footprints, materials that contribute to sequestration of carbon (such as wood materials) and selecting materials which can be recycled.</i> <i>Aim to encourage water saving or retention practices such as grey water systems.</i>
				Positive
				Negative
<p><i>3. Minimisation of flood risks to the area (i.e. promotion of SUD's. protect surface and ground water quality)</i></p>	<p>Will it minimise flood risk from all sources of flooding?</p> <p>Will it reduce property damage due to storm events/ heavy rainfall by improving flood resistance and flood resilience?</p>		X	<p><i>The development will introduce hard surface areas to what is currently a naturally drained parcel of land. This increases the risk of flooding and water runoff into the adjacent natural watercourse.</i></p> <p><i>Lease terms will seek to secure adoption by tenant of as many environmentally friendly and green measures as reasonably practicable</i></p>

					<p><i>in the development. These to include measures that:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Promote permeable surface treatments and landscaping to aid controlled drainage, such as prioritising grasscrete rather than expanses of concrete for the car park.</i>
					Positive
					Negative
<p><i>4. To protect, enhance and create environments that encourage and support biodiversity</i></p>	<p>Will it protect, enhance and increase biodiversity and protect habitats?</p> <p>Will it improve access to and promote educational value of sites of biodiversity interest?</p>		X		<p><i>An area of natural green space will be lost to development of the clubhouse and car park. Whilst the biodiversity value of the land is arguably limited by its current use as a football pitch, there will be loss of an area that provides a feeding ground for birds and fauna.</i></p> <p><i>Lease terms will seek to secure adoption by tenant of as many environmentally friendly and green measures as reasonably practicable in the development. These to include measures that:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Aim to harmonise the development within its adjoining environment – for example by requiring</i>

					<p><i>incorporation of green and natural landscaping and boundary treatments – prioritising hedging and planting over “hard” treatments to encourage biodiversity.</i></p>
					<p>Positive</p>
					<p>Negative</p> <p><i>Location of development will necessitate travel by car more than by sustainable transport modes such as public transport, cycling or walking. This is likely to increase carbon emissions.</i></p> <p><i>Lease terms will seek to secure installation of electric vehicle charge points in the development’s car park to encourage travel by electric cars over combustion engine cars in an attempt to limit carbon emissions.</i></p>
					<p>Positive</p>
<p>5. To improve Air Quality</p> <p><i>(air quality describes how polluted the air we breathe is)</i></p>	<p>Will it improve air quality?</p> <p>Will it reduce emissions of key pollutants?</p>			X	
<p>6. To reduce need to travel, the use of private motorised vehicular transport as well as</p>	<p>Will it encourage increased walking, cycling and use of public transport?</p> <p>Will it increase the proportion of journeys using modes other than a car?</p>			X	<p>Negative</p> <p><i>Location of development will necessitate travel by car more than by sustainable transport modes such as public transport, cycling or</i></p>

<i>encourage walking, cycling, and use of public transport</i>					<p>walking. This is likely to increase carbon emissions.</p> <p>Lease terms will seek to secure installation of electric vehicle charge points in the development's car park to encourage travel by electric cars over combustion engine cars in an attempt to limit carbon emissions.</p>
					<p>Positive</p>

<i>7. To reduce waste production and increase recycling, recovery and reuse of waste</i>	Will it lead to reduced consumption of materials and resources?	X			Negative
	Will it reduce household waste?				
Will it reduce construction waste?					
Will it increase recovery recycling and re-use?					
					Positive
<i>8. To enhance the public realm and street improvements</i>	Will it reduce litter?	X			Negative
	Will it enhance the quality of public realm?				
					Positive

<p><i>9. To protect, enhance and seek opportunities to increase open space</i></p>	<p>Will it improve open space? Will it improve landscape character? Will it minimise development on Greenfield sites?</p>		X		Negative
					<p><i>Development of the clubhouse and car park will represent a loss of circa 8.5% of the public open space at Cadwell Lane. It may also make accessing other parts of the open space more difficult. The lease will seek to retain public access rights over the leased property to the adjacent public open space to reduce the impact on access.</i></p>
					Positive
<p><i>10. To reduce noise and impact of noise</i></p>	<p>Will it reduce noise pollution from vehicles?</p>	X			Negative
					Positive

6.0 Results

	Yes	No	
Were positive impacts identified?	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	
Were negative impacts identified (what actions were taken)	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	Actions are outlined above. In essence, the lease will seek to stipulate obligations that address a proportion of the potential negative impacts identified. Further, if Hitchin Bridge Club secures Planning permission for the development, such permission is likely to be subject to a number of conditions influencing the nature of the development and its use.

7.0 Consultation, decisions and actions

Describe the decision on this activity (refer to section 3.2)

Adjust the proposal.

List all actions identified to address/mitigate negative impact or promote positive impact


Action	Responsible person	Completion due date
Should Cabinet decide to pursue leasing the land to Hitchin Bridge Club, the lease to be negotiated with the Club will incorporate obligations requiring the tenant to adopt as many measures as reasonably practicable to address the negative impacts outlined in this assessment. Examples of mitigating obligations are outlined above.	NHDC's Senior Estates Surveyor	June 2022 (estimated)
Should Cabinet decide to reject leasing the land to Hitchin Bridge Club, alternative options may be explored with the Club, such as using existing buildings at Swinburne Recreation Ground and Ransoms Recreation Ground to adapt for use as a clubhouse. Repurposing one of these existing buildings would obviate the need to build the new clubhouse at Cadwell Lane thus saving on associated resources and embodied carbon.		

When, how and by whom will these actions be monitored?

NHDC's Senior Estates Surveyor by negotiating a lease between NHDC and Hitchin Bridge Club over the next 12 – 18 months (estimated timeframe), subject to Cabinet deciding to pursue a lease of the land.

8.0 Signatures

Assessor (report author):

Name: Christopher Robson Signature** 

Validated by (line manager):

Name: Steven Crowley Signature** 

Forward to the Corporate Policy inbox: corporatpolicy@north-herts.gov.uk

<i>Signature** Reuben Ayavoo</i>	
<i>Assessment date: 06/01/2021</i>	<i>Review date: June 2022</i>

**** Please type your name to allow forms to be sent electronically.
A copy of this form should be forwarded to corporatepolicy@north-herts.gov.uk and a duplicate filed on the council's report system, alongside any report proposing a decision on policy or service change.**

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**HITCHIN COMMITTEE
2 MARCH 2021**

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: GRANTS & COMMUNITY UPDATE

REPORT OF THE POLICY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MANAGER

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

COUNCIL OBJECTIVES: BUILD THRIVING AND RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To advise the Committee on the current expenditure and balances of the Committee Grant budgets.
- 1.2 To bring to the Committee's attention recent requests received for Committee grant funding, made by community groups and local organisations.
- 1.3 To advise the Committee of the activities and schemes with which the Community Engagement officers have been involved in.
- 1.4 To bring to the Committee's attention some important community-based activities that will take place during the next few months.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Committee be recommended to consider allocating funding from their discretionary community budget towards the project below.
- 2.2 **£1,070** to Getting Rooted CIC to assist with the cost training for volunteers working at the Ron's Plot project as outlined in 8.1.1.
- 2.3 That the Committee be recommended to endorse the actions taken by the Community Engagement team to promote greater community capacity and well-being for Hitchin.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To ensure the Committee is kept informed of the work of the Community Engagement Team.
- 3.2 This report is intended to inform Members of the financial resources available to the Committee. It draws attention to the current budgetary situation by assisting in the effective financial management of the Area Committee's budget. This ensures that all actions are performed in line with the Authority's Financial Regulations, the Council's Constitution, and the guidance of the existing Grants policy as agreed by Cabinet in January 2020.
- 3.3 The awarding of financial assistance to voluntary organisations and the use of discretionary spending allows the Committee to further the aims of the Council Plan.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1. There are no alternative options being proposed other than those detailed within the text of this report. However, in the course of debate at committee, Members may wish to comment and offer additional views on any of the items included within this report.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1 Consultation with Members has occurred in connection with the allocation of funds for Community Projects
- 5.2 Consultation with the respective officers and external bodies/groups has taken place regarding funding proposals for Committee Funds.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 With reference to the Council's Constitution, Section 9.3 Area Committees will include budgets for the purpose of providing grants and discretionary budgets that may be used within the area of the Committee for economic, social and environmental well-being. Under the current grant criteria there is no upper limit outlined for the amount of grant funding to be allocated which can be decided at the Committee's discretion.
- 7.2 Members are asked to note the information detailed in Appendix 1. Hitchin Area Committee Budget Spread sheet, which relates to the Area Committee budget balances for 2020/21. The spreadsheet also details pre-allocated sums carried forward from the previous financial years, including balances and past expenditure.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 Grant Applications

8.1.1

Applicant	Getting Rooted CIC
Project	Training for volunteers at Ron's Plot gardening project
Sum requested	£1,070
Total project cost	£2,000
Match funding	£950 Crowdfunding
Previous support	£10,000 from the Capital Grant scheme to provide a greenhouse / training room
NHDC Policy met	Yes
Council objectives	Be a more welcoming and inclusive Council Build thriving and resilient communities Respond to challenges to the environment

Getting Rooted CIC based at Ron's Plot at Burford Way Allotments provide social and therapeutic horticulture through volunteer community gardening sessions. They maintain the garden and grow and share the produce amongst volunteers as well as sharing surplus with local communities via Food Rescue Hub and Sunnyside community front garden.

(Volunteers have recently been referred to the project by the GP Link Worker Hitchin & Whitwell, Hospital & Community Navigation Service)

At Ron's Plot Community Allotment, they engage with and welcome the contributions of residents, community groups and businesses; working collaboratively with local people. They often receive donations from local residents who may or may not visit the project but share advice and information on gardening and best practice with via social media. During partial school closures they shared outdoor learning activities locally and nationally via social media to encourage families to utilise the outdoors for their mental and physical wellbeing.

They work on frequent and regular opportunities to improve the partnership and relationship between the Council and with local community. Their reach extends out from their Westmill base on the Burford Way Allotments to local towns and villages of North Hertfordshire via social media.

They also coordinate gardening workshops for children and young people. They are applying for funding towards the cost of training. This will support local schools and community groups and home education networks. These groups can then start or improve permaculture designed outdoor educational settings within their own communities and bubbles. Thus, allowing their community allotment 'Ron's Plot' to be used as a learning hub and an example of good practice.

The course will take the form of on-line training run by the Permaculture Association.

With funding to train additional mentors and develop and improve the community provision at Ron's Plot they can create a range of innovative ways in which local communities from small groups to whole towns and communities of interest can be encouraged to become more involved in supporting, planning, improving and maintaining local environments.

Some of the volunteers are already involved in other green projects which they share e.g. litter picking to encourage others. Getting Rooted are also in touch with a local arts charity, local BAME charities, home education groups and local GP social prescriber (GP Link Worker Hitchin & Whitwell) to encourage future opportunities to work with a wide range of communities.

Partnership work with the above community groups will hopefully ensure that they engage more with their diverse communities including with young residents and those who are disadvantaged or in any way socially excluded. By creating not just a community garden workspace, but a safe leisure space, they hope to ensure innovations they've proposed are fit for the future and imaginative in concept and delivery

Getting Rooted CIC seek to provide a clean and safe environment in partnership with stakeholders and local people. Their permaculture values of caring for the earth; caring for people and sharing resources fairly are at the core of their practice and educating within the local community.

They are an innovative and inclusive group and would like to expand the provision by helping train up other local people within their own projects and bubbles.

This will not only increase mental and emotional well-being by working outdoors and learning how to grow their own food, but to reap the benefits of perhaps developing an entrepreneurial approach as they develop their resilience.

The training will help them to deepen their permaculture approach to land management which helps to mimic and replicate the dynamics of natural ecosystems and supports biodiversity.

With the training of additional mentors, the group will be enabled to disseminate more widely their values of caring for the earth and for local environments.

Getting Rooted CIC will continue to develop horticulture enterprise by growing surplus seedlings and plants to sell on to the local community. They also aspire to create new job opportunities by training up mentors to run workshops on site and online in order to enable and empower local communities.

8.2 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT UPDATE

8.2.1 Policy and Community Engagement Team

The team have been continuing to engage and network with local community groups and initiatives. This involved:

- Supporting various local and district wide Network Groups such as Youth Action, Food Provision and Westmill.
- Facilitating virtual Hitchin Councillors' Surgeries via Zoom.
- Coordinating a successful on-line event to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day.
- Coordinate the Chair's Volunteer Awards, to be announced on 26th February.
- Gathering speakers and information for the Cabinet Panel for Community Engagement and Co-operative Development.
- Continuing to Hitchin Arts and Culture Town Talk and planning ongoing meetings of a sub-committee to encourage the creation of an Arts Cooperative.
- Collating information on Safe and Well provision throughout the winter months.
- monitoring and updating funding agreements with key partners, North Herts Centre for Voluntary Service, Citizens Advice and North Herts Minority Ethnic Forum.

8.3 Highways Matters

8.3.1 This section is included within the community update report for each committee cycle to facilitate debate and enable appropriate feedback on any of the proposed or listed Highways related schemes.

8.3.2 Any new proposals or revised schemes will be forwarded to the respective Herts County Councillor for consideration who will in turn report back and advise the Committee accordingly.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Sections 9.8.1 (a) and 9.8.1 (b) of the Council's Constitution in respect of the Area Committees' Terms of Reference, notes the following:- To allocate discretionary budgets within the terms determined by the Council and to allocate devolved budgets and activities within the terms determined by the Council. This is outlined in the current Grant Policy agreed by Cabinet in January 2020.

Section 9.8.2 (h) of the Constitution in respect of Area Committees' Terms of Reference notes that they may:- Establish and maintain relationships with outside bodies/voluntary organisations operating specifically with the area including, where appropriate, the provision of discretionary grant aid/financial support etc. but excluding grants for district-wide activities.

- 9.2 Chapter 1, s1-8 of the Localism Act 2011 provides a General Power of Competence which gives local authorities the powers to do anything provided that it is not specifically prohibited in legislation.
- 9.3 Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 provides specific authority for the Council to incur expenditure on anything which is in the interests of and will bring direct benefit to its area. This includes a charity or other body operating for public service.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 As outlined in Appendix A - Hitchin Area Committee budget sheet 2020/21.
- 10.2 There was no carry forward budget from 2019/20 and the base budget for the 2020/21 financial year remains at £11,000.
- 10.3 Thus far Hitchin committee has provided **£6,465** grant funding from the 2020/21 budget. Including the £2,000 allocated for the Hitchin Quaker's these leaves **£2,535** to utilise for the remainder of the financial year.
- 10.4 The grant funding applied for at this meeting adds up to **£1,070**. If Councillors agreed this grant, there would be **£1,465** remaining of the Hitchin Committee budget. This would be carried over to the 2021/2022 financial year.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There are no relevant risk entries that have been recorded on Pentana Risk, the Council's performance and risk system. Individual events should have their own risk assessments in place to mitigate any health and safety issues. Whenever a request for grant funding for equipment is received, the recipient of the funding will be advised to obtain insurance for the item to avoid a repeat request for funding in the event of the equipment being stolen or damaged. There are no pertinent risk implications for the Authority associated with any items within this report.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.2. Area Committee funding is awarded to community groups that clearly demonstrate positive impact on the community and wider environment. The projects outlined in this report seek to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this report.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 There are no pertinent Human Resource implications associated with any items within this report.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix 1 - 2020/21 financial year budget sheet.

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 Review of Policies and Procedures for Financial Assistance to Voluntary and Community Organisations, November 2002.

18.2 Review of Grant Policy Cabinet January 2020.

HITCHIN AREA COMMITTEE BUDGET 2020/21

SUMMARY/ TOTALS 2020/21	Funding	Allocated	Spent	Outstanding	Unallocated Budget					
Central Area Grants	£11,000	£8,465	£6,465	£2,000	£2,535					
Total	£11,000	£8,465	£6,465	£2,000	£2,535					

DEVELOPMENT BUDGETS

Central Area Grants	Funding		Project	Allocated	Date Allocated	Spent	Outstanding	Unallocated Budget	Comments
2020/21 Base Budget	£11,000		Tilehouse Counselling	£640	May-20	£640	£0		
			Hitchin Food Provision Team	£2,000	May-20	£2,000	£0		
			PHASE (Providing Help & Support)	£1,925	Jun-20	£1,925	£0		
			Hitchin Fun Club	£900	29/09/2020	£900	£0		
			Strathmore Fun Club	£1,000	29/09/20	£1,000	£0		
			Hitchin Quaker Meeting	£2,000	01/12/20		£2,000		Funding for this was agreed but funding to be held until full funding for project is secured
Total	£11,000			£8,465		£6,465	£2,000	£2,535	

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