

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
MEETING OF THE MEMBERS OF THE HITCHIN COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD AS A REMOTE MEETING
ON TUESDAY, 15TH JUNE, 2021 AT 7.30 PM

NOTES

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

In Attendance: *Danny Pearson (Assistant Community Engagement Officer), Hilary Dineen (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager) and Anna Gouveia (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer)*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting 2 members of the public, including registered speakers.*

1 WELCOME

Audio recording – 14 seconds

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

She undertook a roll call to ensure that all Member, Officers and members of the public could hear and be heard.

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager outlined the meeting procedure as follows:

- This was not a formal meeting of the Hitchin Committee;
- At the request of Members this virtual meeting had been called to allow for informal discussion of ward matters and to keep Members informed of local issues;
- This meeting had no decision-making powers;
- The reports presented at this meeting were for Members' information only;
- Members should observe the usual guidance on the conduct of remote meetings as outlined in the previous Remote/Partly Remote Meetings protocol;
- Members should note that the normal requirements to declare interests remained in place for this meeting.

2 TO ELECT AN INDIVIDUAL TO CHAIR THE VIRTUAL MEETING

Audio recording – 2 minutes 57 seconds

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager advised that the first order of business was to elect a Chair for this meeting.

Any Member elected as Chair would be for this meeting only. The Chair of the Committee for the Civic Year 2021/22 would be elected either at full Council or at the next meeting of this Committee.

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager called for nominations for a Chair of this meeting.

Councillor Hoskins proposed that Councillor Ian Albert be elected as Chair of the meeting. Councillor Mike Hughson seconded the proposal.

There being no other nominations it was:

AGREED: That Councillor Ian Albert be elected as Chair for this meeting of the Members of the Hitchin Committee.

3 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 4 minutes 35 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Kay Tart.

4 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS FOR DISCUSSION

Audio recording – 4 minutes 51 seconds

The Chair advised that Councillor Simon Harwood would be talking about King George V Playing Fields under Wards Matters (Note 9 refers).

5 TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 41 seconds

- (1) The Chair of the meeting thanked former Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb, who stood for election in Letchworth at the election held on 6 May 2021, for his work for the Committee and for the District.
- (2) The Chair of the meeting welcomed Councillor Nigel Mason, who had been elected at the election held on 6 May 2021.
- (3) The Chair of the meeting reminded Members that declarations of interest should be made in the usual manner.

6 PRESENTATION BY HITCHIN YOUTH TRUST

Audio recording – 5 minutes 20 seconds

Helen Owen, Hitchin Youth Trust, thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the meeting and gave a presentation regarding the work of the Hitchin Mental Health Recovery Team as follows:

- She was representing the Hitchin Mental Health Recovery Team;
- This was set up by Rotary and Hitchin Youth Trust after joining together with 9 other local organisations;
- At the beginning of the pandemic this group concentrated on food provision;
- It was soon recognised that there was a need to support young people with their mental health;
- The Group liaised with representatives from the secondary and primary schools in the Hitchin area;

- They put together a recovery programme for young people for this academic year, but due to the long term lockdowns the timespan had grown to include the next academic year;
- Once the need had been identified, groups including Phase, GRIT, Letchworth Centre for Healthy Living, Tilehouse Counselling, NESSIE and Hitchin Partnership worked together to put together a programme to meet the needs identified by the schools;
- Due to the continuing lockdowns these programmes could not be delivered;
- Some online support was provided initially and face to face programmes were in place;
- The feedback from the schools had been very positive;
- The aim was to provide low level intervention in order to prevent the need for more serious intervention;
- It had been shocking to realise that the number of issues affecting young people;
- They had received a number of grants, but this was only sufficient to provide low level intervention;
- This term they had spent £21,500. They had £13,500 available to spend next term;
- They would need a further £17,000 to be able to carry this programme through the summer months into the next academic year;
- They were hoping that the group would be able to continue to work together even after the recovery programme had concluded.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Mike Hughson;
- Councillor Ian Albert.

Helen Owen responded to those questions as follows:

- The main issues for young people were:
 - Mixing with the wrong crowd and getting involved in alcohol and drugs;
 - Getting anxious about social media contact;
 - Missing face to face contact;
 - Depression and anxiety.
- They were applying for further grant funding from various sources;
- They had set up a Just Giving page, but this had not received much feedback.

Councillor Judi Billing advised that there were at least 3 County Councillors who could be approached for grant funding;

The Assistant Community Engagement Officer advised that there would be a meeting of the North Herts Action Group Network on 16 June 2021.

The Chair thanked Helen Owen for her presentation.

7 PRESENTATION BY HITCHIN FESTIVAL

Audio recording – 22 minutes 27 seconds

Councillor Keith Hoskins declared an interest in that he was a Director of the Hitchin Festival. Having sought advice from the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager, he advised that he would take no part in any debate and vote and would turn off his camera.

Councillor Judi Billing declared a declarable interest in that she was a committee member of the Hitchin Festival. Having sought advice from the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager, she advised that, as she took no part in the financial decisions relating to the Festival, she would take part in any debate.

Councillors Sam Collins and Ian Albert advised that they had donated to the Hitchin Festival Just Giving page.

Glynn Doggett, Director of Hitchin Festival, thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the meeting and gave a presentation regarding the planning of the 2021 Hitchin Festival as follows:

- The Hitchin Festival had been going for 30 years;
- It was set up to promote arts in Hitchin;
- The Festival brings together different arts organisations under the Hitchin Festival banner each July;
- The most recent project is called The Dell at Woodside;
- The Dell is an open air space next to the Queen Mother Theatre created 70 years ago to celebrate the arts;
- This is an outdoor space that is open to the public;
- In response to Covid and the need to undertake outdoor events, the aim this year was to turn it back into an outdoor theatre;
- A week of mixed events for all ages had been planned from 24 – 31 July 2021;
- The preparation work had been undertaken and now it was time to raise the funds required to enable the events to run;
- Crowd funding had so far raised £2,000 and they had received £11,000 in donations and grant funding;
- They were seeking funding from Hitchin Committee to enable this project to take place this year, with the aim of repeating it every year;
- In future year would wish to link with schools to use the area.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Sam Collins.

In response to questions Glyn Doggett advised:

- They are looking at hiring portaloos for the event;
- They were considering options for local food providers to provide a food outlet, although it would likely be a case bring your own refreshments for this year;
- Waste disposal was being considered and any help in this area would be gratefully accepted;
- During the event the area would be fenced and security would be in place;
- Further events during the summer would be dependent on cost.

The Chair thanked Glynn Doggett for his presentation.

8 HITCHIN BID MANAGER

Mr Tom Hardy, Hitchin BID Manager, was unable to attend the meeting.

9 GRANTS & COMMUNITY UPDATE

Audio recording – 39 minutes 20 seconds

Councillor Keith Hoskins declared a pecuniary interest in that he was a Director of the Hitchin Festival. Having sought advice from the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager, he advised that he would take no part in any debate and vote and would turn off his camera.

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Councillor Judi Billing declared a declarable interest in that she was a committee member of the Hitchin Festival. Having sought advice from the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager, she advised that, as she took no part in the financial decisions relating to the Festival, she would take part in any debate.

Councillors Sam Collins and Ian Albert advised that they had donated to the Hitchin Festival Just Giving page.

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

- Appendix 1 – 2021/22 Financial Year Budget Sheet.

He informed Members that the Committee had £1,465 of unallocated funds carried forward from the 2020/21 Civic Year and £11,000 funds to allocated in the 2021/22 Civic Year.

He further updated Members on the following:

Getting Rooted/Ron's Plot

- The plot was looking fabulous;
- Due to Covid restrictions usual activities had not taken place;
- There were a lot of volunteers keen to get stalls up and running again;
- The large green house was up and being used.

Coronavirus Support Grant

- The African Caribbean Lunch Club had received grant funding to provide tablets to enable people to keep in contact.

Quaker Meeting House Pace Garden

- This was slowly coming out of hibernation and they were working towards getting the project up and running again.

North Herts Creatives

- North Herts Creatives attended the Cabinet Panel on Community Engagement and Co-operative Development Panel meeting;
- A lot of ideas about networking and sharing.

Network Groups

- The Team was supporting various District wide network groups.

Westmill Centre

- The Team was keeping in contact with the Westmill Centre, particularly in light of the development in the area;
- There had been some anti-social behaviour at the MUGA, work was being undertaken to clean the area up and make it more secure.

Ravadassia Centre

- Work had stopped during the pandemic, due to the difficulties in getting building supplies;
- Work had now recommenced and was progressing;
- It was hoped that the Centre would be open for the summer holidays, but more likely would be September.

Grant Funding

- Hitchin Festival were seeking grant funding of £2,185 to assist with creating a week-long series of events in the Dell Open Air Theatre at Woodside.

Councillor Clark proposed that the Executive Member for Community Engagement be advised that the Members of the Hitchin Committee supports the award of grant funding of £2185 be awarded to Hitchin Festival as detailed in the report. Councillor Sam Collins seconded the proposal and it was:

AGREED:

- (1) That the Members of the Hitchin Committee supports the award of £2,185 in grant funding to Hitchin Festival to assist with creating a week-long series of events in the Dell Open Air Theatre at Woodside;
- (2) That the Executive Member for Community Engagement be requested to consider and support the grant funding application, as detailed in (1) above.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION: 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.

10 DISCUSSION ITEM - ARTS & CULTURE IN HITCHIN

Audio recording – 53 minutes 44 seconds

The Chair led a discussion on Arts and Culture in Hitchin.

He advised that Members had brought together various groups and this work had been built on in the discussions held at the Cabinet Panel on Community Engagement and Co-Operative Development meeting held on 7 June 2021.

The Council would, where possible, provide facilitation for groups to speak to and work with each other.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Judi Billing;
- Councillor Keith Hoskins;
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg;
- Councillor Sam Collins.

Members comments included:

- That arts and culture will play a large part in reinvigorating town centres;
- That there had been many discussions in many forums regarding arts and culture
- The springboard phase of holding discussions had been successful so far and it was now time to consolidate those discussions;
- The Council had a role in bringing various organisations together.

Glynn Doggett, Hitchin Festival suggested that a list of creatives could be provided on the NHDC website.

11 WARD MATTERS AND OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

Audio recording – 1 hour 7 minutes 30 seconds

The following Ward Matters were discussed:

Community Space at King George V Playing Field

Councillor Simon Harwood advised:

- Hitchin Rugby Club maintained the facilities and land at King George V Playing Fields;
- They had an aspiration to develop the club facilities;
- The facilities were used by several groups;
- North Herts Crusaders Rugby League team played at this venue;
- Hitchin Band also practiced here;
- The common aspiration was to find a common usable space that was fit for purpose;
- There was an interest in developing a new community facility on the King George V site;
- He was trying to provide a community event for all of the groups to express their needs;
- Some groups had funding that could be put towards a facility;
- Picnic tables on the field had been vandalised, these had been replaced by the Rugby Club;
- The Rugby Club now had a community relationships officer

The following Members took part in the discussion:

- Councillor Val Bryant;
- Councillor Judi Billing.

Comments from Members included:

- There were many groups looking for premises;
- That if there were too many groups involved in one scheme then there would be an issue with availability;
- All opportunities should be considered;
- Could look at spaces in the Town Centre that could be reconfigured to provide community space.

Members acknowledged that there would be many hurdles to overcome, although were supportive of an initial fact gathering meeting.

AGREED:

- (1) That the Assistant Community Engagement Officer be requested to invite the Hitchin Rugby Club Community Relationships Officer to attend a future meeting of the Committee:
- (2) That Members of the Hitchin Committee work towards provision of a fact gathering meeting to which community groups would be invited.

Pedestrianisation of Hitchin Town Centre

Councillor Ian Albert discussed the pedestrianisation of the Town Centre and asked Members to indicate their support for this scheme to continue.

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AGREED: That the Members of the Hitchin Committee supports the continuation of the pedestrianisation of Hitchin Town Centre and that the consultation on this issue be advised of this support.

Hitchin Allotment Association

Councillor Ian Albert advised that meetings had been agreed with members of the Hitchin Allotment Association to discuss their needs.

12 TO DISCUSS ANY POSSIBLE ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Audio recording – 1 hour 28 minutes 37 seconds

Fair Trade

Councillor Paul Clark queried what was being done to promote Hitchin as a Fair Trade Town.

Councillor Ian Albert advised that this would be discussed at the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee.

AGREED: That Fair Trade be discussed at the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee.

The meeting closed at 9.02 pm

Chair