

28 November 2022

Our Ref Hitchin Committee/8 December 2022
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To: Members of the Committee: Councillor Ian Albert (Chair), Councillor Clare Billing (Vice-Chair), Councillor Raj Bhakar, Councillor Val Bryant, Councillor Sam Collins, Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, Councillor James Denselow, Councillor Keith Hoskins MBE, Councillor Chris Lucas, Councillor Nigel Mason, Councillor Kay Tart and Councillor Richard Thake

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN OF A

MEETING OF THE HITCHIN COMMITTEE

to be held in the

HITCHIN TOWN HALL, BRAND STREET, HITCHIN, SG5 1JE

On

THURSDAY, 8TH DECEMBER, 2022 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. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE	
2. MINUTES - 11 OCTOBER 2022 To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 11 October 2022.	(Pages 5 - 16)
3. 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.	
4. 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.	
5. HITCHIN BID MANAGER To receive a verbal presentation from the Hitchin BID Manager.	
6. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION To receive petitions, comments and questions from the public.	
7. AIR QUALITY UPDATE VERBAL UPDATE FROM THE ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH MANAGER To receive a verbal update from the Environmental Health Manager on the Air Quality Monitoring in Hitchin. This has previously been discussed at the Hitchin Area Committee at the meeting of the 28 June 2022 and relevant papers and Minutes can be found here: Agenda for Hitchin Committee on Tuesday, 28th June, 2022, 7.30 pm North Herts Council (north-herts.gov.uk) .	

8. **INFORMATION NOTE - CHURCHGATE SHOPPING CENTRE UPDATE** (Pages
INFORMATION NOTE OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR – ENTERPRISE 17 - 18)

To provide Members an update on Churchgate Shopping Centre.

9. **GRANTS AND COMMUNITY UPDATE** (Pages
REPORT OF THE POLICY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MANAGER 19 - 32)

To advise the Members on the current expenditure and balances of the Committee Grant budgets.

To bring to the Members' attention recent requests received for Committee grant funding, made by community groups and local organisations.

To advise of the activities and schemes with which the Community Engagement officers have been involved in.

To bring to the Members' attention some important community-based activities that will take place during the next few months.

10. **WARD MATTERS AND OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS - MEMBERS' REPORTS**

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

11. **POSSIBLE AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS**

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

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Public Document Pack Agenda Item 2

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

HITCHIN COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE CHRISTCHURCH, BEDFORD ROAD, HITCHIN
ON TUESDAY, 11TH OCTOBER, 2022 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Councillor Ian Albert (Chair), Councillor Clare Billing (Vice-Chair), Judi Billing, Val Bryant, Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, Keith Hoskins, Chris Lucas, Nigel Mason and Richard Thake*

In Attendance: *Danny Pearson (Assistant Community Engagement Officer) and Abigail Hamilton*

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

78 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received by Councillor Raj Bhakar, Kay Tart and Sam Collins

Councillor James Denselow was absent

79 MINUTES - 28 JUNE 2022

Councillor Ian Albert, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Keith Hoskins seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 28 June 2022 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

80 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business notified.

81 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

- (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.

82 HITCHIN BID MANAGER

Audio recording –

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 and drew attention to the following:

- Some businesses are seeing a 300% increase in their utility bills. We are doing a workshop with businesses on how to look up cost saving initiatives. We are working with an organisation to deliver that
- I am working with the Association of Town and City Managers on a national campaign to lobby to government to lower the VAT rate by 215% for a period of time similar to what they did in the pandemic and other European countries. Also lobbying for a business rates review that we were promised in 2019. We need to level the playing field between all businesses and bricks and mortar high street businesses
- We are doing a lot of work with other towns. We have 200 bids signed up to this and I am attending regular meetings for this
- I held a Churchgate business meeting where all the businesses in Churchgate were invited. 7 of them replied saying they would come and 23 ended up turning up. I am on the project board representing businesses so I wanted to get a good idea of how they felt about building, short and long term aspirations, and understand issues.
- I will be working with Councillor Hoskins on a questionnaire that we will get out to businesses. We want to understand what the priorities are and how to take this to the next project board meeting.
- As for updates in the town, we are changing all our summer planting to winter planting.
- The Christmas lights will be going up on the 24th October for testing. These won't be turned on until after Remembrance.
- The Christmas tree is due to be installed around a week before the Christmas lights will be turned on, this will be Saturday 19th November. This will be from 12pm-8pm this year. We have the kids carols in the daytime and the lights will be turned on at 6pm.
- We have put up 42 lamp post banners around the town and there are print and postcards in the information centre as they were quite popular on social media
- We have come up with a new brand for Hitchin, it is a H with two lines coming off it. This will start to be shown around the town. Many people don't know what it is so we are trying to come up with a public facing brand so people recognise this as Hitchin brand.
- We are using this to move into a new website which should be launched in the next couple months called Visit Hitchin. This will work alongside Hitchin hub. Visit Hitchin will be for residents, public and visitors and Hitchin hub will be for business related things.
- We have the French market arriving Thursday-Sunday. We have the Halloween trail arriving at the end of the month.
- We are not going ahead with the Christmas market this year. We had mixed feedback, we had 15 market stalls which was good but the public expected more and this wouldn't work for businesses. We have decided to go back to what we did originally and fill weekends up with activities that complement the businesses in the town.
- We have the Christmas light switch on on the 19th November, rotary food and wine on the 26th November, the art hub on 2nd December. We have the Hitchin market taking over the market place on the 10th and 11th December. We are holding a big event on the 17th and 18th which will be thing such as a snow globe, reindeer petting, etc. We will have the grotto in the cabby hut which will be run by the Garden Hospice.
- We also have a tractor trail coming through the town. 200 tractors on the 17th December at 7:30.

- There will also be a snowman trail. Around 12 snowmen around 6ft high will be around the town. They are based on the film 'Snowman'. This will be from the 14th December until the end of January.
- For businesses, there will be a winning windows competition, a Christmas video promoting all businesses, a Christmas lights parade during the Christmas lights switch on, and we are putting out a H town newspaper which will be a Christmas edition with a gift guide containing various gifts you can buy in the town
- I have had a lot of businesses come to me with various issues with parking. I have attended various parking meetings with the District Council and the thing that seems to come up frequently is the ability to pay on exit. A lot of car parks now do it, it is very cheap on technology. A lot of people come into the information centre asking for directions and many say they don't have time on their ticket. I think if they had pay on exit it would create more dwell time. People would go to coffee shops and retailers. Retailers are really feeling it as many people that come to shops have to rush back to their car. I'm keen to work with the District Council to do a trail of this.
- The next business breakfast is on the 19th October. This will be at the Elite café at 7:30am and breakfast will be served at 8. The Hitchin BID AGM is being held at the same day but at 6pm at the Sun Hotel.
- Next year we will be starting the renewal ballot again in February,. We are due to go to ballot in November next year so we will be starting the process. The ballot will happen in 4 weeks, so the month of November. If we are successful the new BID term will start in April 2024.
- I am working with officers on an economic development survey which includes a feasibility study for a potential BID in the industrial centre.
- We are looking at events for next year and what worked and what didn't this year. If Members have any ideas then let us know.
- The Kings coronation will be held on the 6th May. We have a big screen booked for that.
- We are looking at potentially having another carnival on the 7th May.
- I have some monthly newsletters and the annual report for 2021/22 that I will leave for Members to take.

Councillor Albert highlighted that they are keen to look at whether having a BID in the industrial centre would be positive and it links to the LCWIP and discussions that were had at the town talk before the meeting.

The following Members asked questions:

- Nigel Mason

In response to questions, Tom Hardy advised:

- No, we won't have football on the big screen. Football events have to have a safety advisor group, higher security than other events and this becomes very costly. There are lots of pubs around town that will show this. We also don't want to take business away from local pubs

Councillor Bryant mentioned that she was happy to hear the proposal for pay on exit car parks and agrees that this will help retailers and people staying longer.

Danny Pearson informed Members that the two grant applicants for this evening have both cancelled yesterday, in summary:

- The Letchworth Centre for Healthy Living approached the Letchworth committee two weeks ago and were advised to get a third quote. They were hoping they would get a new quote but they haven't so they have pulled out this evening until they hear back from the Letchworth committee and they may defer to December or the new year.
- NCT were successful in a Tesco blue chip grant and they want to come back in December.

Councillor Ian Albert informed Members that James Willis from Hitchin Creatives was also meant to be in attendance but will hopefully come to the December meeting instead. He also reminded Members the exhibition will be open in the museum on Friday.

Councillor Ian Albert gave a statement in support of the Plastic Free Initiative which read:

North Hertfordshire Council fully supports the work Plastic Free Hitchin and other groups are doing in our local community. Over the past year both officers and councillors have supported Plastic Free Hitchin. This includes:

- Publicising and sharing of activities online and in council newsletters.
- Providing a venue for the recent Pre-loved Uniform Pop-up Shop in Bancroft Gardens.
- Collecting the waste gathered during July's litter pick on Windmill Hill
- A regular call between key councillors and officers and all waste reduction initiatives in the district, to facilitate collaboration across towns.

The council is regularly participating in communication campaigns to educate residents around the issues around waste and plastic in particular. Furthermore the council is currently reviewing its waste collection regime to encourage residents further to reduce their waste.

North Hertfordshire Council is looking forward to continuing its work with Plastic Free Hitchin in future.

The Chair invited Ann Sander, Plastic Free Hitchin, to give a verbal presentation which included:

- We got accredited and we have been working towards the plastic free community framework. It is a mature framework that towns, cities and neighbourhoods can enter to get accredited. We got the certificate in July so we can advertise as a plastic free community. We worked towards 5 objectives to achieve this.
- 5th objective was a steering group
 - The idea is to have bigger ideas and look at the real issues around waste and single use plastic around the town and how we can solve this
 - The key things that came up in the meeting were a deposit scheme for coffee cups and takeaway containers
 - We will meet 4 times a year
- 4th objective was to run a certain amount of events
 - We exceeded this and going forward to be considered an active plastic free community you have to run 3 events a year. We have done 10 so far and we are planning to do 12 over the next couple months.
 - We did a uniform pop up which as one of our biggest and most well known event. Over 1000 garments were reused and we raised over £1400 for local

schools which got distributed. We want to allow more schools to participate and there has been some interest from secondary schools.

- The next event will be the Halloween costume swap in the market square.
- We want to do a similar thing with Christmas jumpers.
- Eco day was really successful in the summer and we are hoping to do it next year
- Another really successful event was the repair café. We have hosted 3 of these this year. The most restrictive factor right now is volunteers and we are looking for more repairers. We are hoping to increase numbers to run 4 or 5 events if we can find enough volunteers. The last event was booked up within 3 days and we repaired over 100 items in the last year.
- 3rd objective was community allies
 - This is any organisation, group or hub that isn't a business.
 - We have to work with 30 allies across the town which included the library, swimming pool, brownie and guide groups and all secondary schools signed up
 - All allies have to sign a pledge that they support the cause and to look at their own use of single use plastic and to educate and participate in events
 - Some allies are more active than others
- 2nd objective was businesses
 - We had to get 12 to sign up. Currently we have 15 signed up and lots were interested
 - There are 3 that are going through the accreditation process themselves. It is harder for allies to do it. They have to prove they are reducing single use plastic. Once they prove this they are awarded the plastic free champion status.
 - They have recently introduced a tier system of bronze, silver and gold.
 - We are working with businesses to get accredited to a high standard. We plan to engage with at least 6 but a lot are keen to do it
- 1st objective was working with the Council
 - Plastic free Letchworth led the way and the Council passed a motion to support the plastic free framework
 - We have bi-annual meetings with Councillors and officers to talk about different plastic free initiatives and other waste initiatives across the district and where the Council can support our work
 - This is going really well and North Herts is one of the more active Councils
- If the Councillors could fill in the survey and provide some feedback it would be appreciated.

Councillor Judi Billing highlighted that we have been engaging more with schools about local democracy. We have found primary schools are very enthusiastic but secondary schools need longer to engage fully.

Councillor Val Bryant mentioned that herself and Councillor Dennis-Harburg are part of the plastic free initiative. She attended the repair café and it was really positive and how you can repair things yourself and continue to use them. Hopefully we can increase engagement

The Chair thanked Ann Sander for her presentation.

84 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Chair invited Haziq Patel, Hitchin Mosque to give a verbal presentation which included:

- A mosque is more than a place of worship. It is a hub for social gatherings, a place for education, a place people can meet and gather and look after their wellbeing.
- The original mosque in Saudi Arabia had what we now would see as a charity. It held events, had a homeless shelter, held other faith groups and cultural fairs, distributed wealth and food and funeral rights.
- Hitchin has a well established Muslim population and the mosque was established in 1984 in a terrace residential property. It is a registered charity and the maintenance and repairs are managed from the donations and goodwill of the congregation
- The Hitchin Mosque has a broad demographic and ethnically diverse representation and endeavours to support key deprived areas our community
- The mosque remains a valuable community lifeline for the elderly and vital support to those with disabilities and their carers
- The Muslim population has continued to group and has subsequently outgrown the current building and we are now in desperate need for a larger premises.
- The mosque must remain accessible as Muslims are encouraged to pray 5 times a day. The current location has allowed generation families to settle around Hitchin Walsworth and Hitchin Bearton areas
- There is also parking, as Ramadan in particular has high levels of traffic in the evenings, as well as the Friday Community Congregational prayer at midday. The lack of dedicated parking or suitable off-road parking means that it becomes difficult for members or visitors to arrive by their own transport
- The mosque has a growing demand to deliver after school and weekend educational classes to Muslim children. There is also occasional demand for the mosque to be visited by local schools as part of RE studies. These have to be limited in size at present
- The Islamic Society of Hitchin participated in inter-faith meetings and has quarterly open sessions in Hitchin town with a stall. Due to lack of space we are unable to hold public sessions. We would like to offer additional services as well, such as funeral and marriage services
- We would like to ask your help in identifying a new suitable location that can accommodate the needs and growing Muslim community and to allow us to offer more extensive services. It needs to have dedicated or suitable off-road parking, ideally with a central location, but could also be in a mixed use area to minimise congestion.

The Chair thanked Haziq Patel for his presentation.

The following members asked questions:

- Judi Billing
- Nigel mason
- Keith Hoskins
- Ian Albert
- Chris Lucas
- Richard Thake

In response to questions, Haziq Patel advised:

- A mosque has certain connotations. Ideally a mosque is an open space, similar to the Church we are in tonight. It doesn't have to be anything specific that other religious buildings may need. The two wards are well represented and well recognised as the core community. They are there naturally because the mosque is there. The mosque

comes first, and the people move in around it. The mixed-use area would be a good location as it is not as far and is still accessible. We are happy to consider any land or buildings that are not in use that are suitable we could use that. We are open to anything.

- A lot of the events happen around prayer times. So having a facility within the mosque would be needed and very helpful. The Minority Ethnic Forum have been very helpful and have been looking at solutions such as having Eid in the park or other festivities at other locations.
- There isn't any size necessarily. We need a lot of floor space to allow for the carpets and for people to stand. It needs to be facing a south east direction. Washing facilities are also very important. We also would like facilities for those with disabilities for example. There are other mosques in other areas that have adjacent community facilities that can be rented out and this would also be a helpful thing to look at
- We are in the early stages of scoping

85 CONSULTATION ON NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT LOCAL CYCLING AND WALKING INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

Edward Leigh gave introduced the LCWIP consultation for Members which included:

- This plan is out for consultation at the moment.
- It is for walking and cycling, looking at wider pavements, safer junctions, protected cycle lanes where we can find space, other traffic measures, etc
- The modal filters are what make streets more safer and attractive for people walking or cycling. This can include bollards on a road to stop through traffic, a one way system, reducing lanes, etc. These are often more controversial things as it may change the way people drive.
- This is the first iteration and it focuses on towns in North Herts, Knebworth and the route from Hitchin to Stevenage.
- We have identified routes in rural areas that are high priority but there are limited resources of mapping out the district so we are starting in towns and building outwards
- We will review the plan in 2 years with Herts County Council and provided we have funding we will do a second iteration.
- The consultation is online and runs until Monday 7th November. This involves maps of all towns
- We encourage residents, local businesses and groups to go online and make comments, suggestions or criticisms.
- We want to get a plan that is the best it can possibly be with the things that people want
- The slides that have been sent to the Councillors introduce the website. There is a map of Hitchin and as you scroll down it shows you in more detail the proposed changes. The "have your say" button is where you can add your comments.
- All comments are reviewed and then published anonymously so everyone can see them
- Hitchin has a good level of engagement already.
- There is also a more general survey that can be completed
- Active Travel England have funding and we can also use funding from developers

The following Members asked questions:

- Clare Billing

In response to questions, Edward Leigh advised:

- The transport plan is starting a sustainable spine to link Hitchin, Letchworth and Baldock. If we could create safer cycling routes this would create a large difference in road traffic. There is a major focus on how we can join towns together. There are alternative routes but many aren't easy to do
- Not sure if the Hitchin hoop is completely continuous. In Letchworth there was a goal to create a continuous loop and there is an aspiration to do this in Royston too. The LCWIP is more focused on utility routes, e.g. commuting. If there are elements of this that we can help we should be including those. To create a leisure route this would maybe be more of a community initiative

Councillor Nigel Mason agreed it was difficult to cycle from one side of Hitchin to the other.

Councillor Ian Albert suggested that it was up to the committee on how they wanted to respond to this. The Councillors could send in the responses and we can send a collective response as a Hitchin Area Committee.

Councillor Richard Thake commented on two of the traffic calming areas. Some of the things in the plan are aspirational and others are being done. He also mentioned his work with some Parish Councils.

Councillor Ian Albert also thanked Edward for the town talk.

It was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Committee note the report
- (2) That Members are encouraged to respond to the North Herts District LCWIP consultation draft and encourage residents and local organisations to do so.

86 INFORMATION NOTE - CHURCHGATE SHOPPING CENTRE UPDATE

Councillor Ian Albert updated Members on the recent acquisition of the Churchgate Shopping Centre which included:

- This will be included in the next town talk and we can explore its possibilities
- There is a meeting next week about if we can do a more formal public consultation before Christmas
- We have had some comments. For example a child asked when the cinema was coming. This shows that there is interest from both young and old residents about what is in our town

Councillor Keith Hoskins also added that by the next meeting we should have a public consultation schedule

87 CHARNWOOD HOUSE UPDATE

Councillor Keith Hoskins provided an update for Members on Charnwood House which included:

- The asbestos removal has gone ahead and should have been completed today
- There was a meeting convened with all the interested parties that came to the open day. This was attended by about 30
- The Charnwood community management association now has some new trustees which we will hopefully meet at the end of this week and can put together a proper proposal for it to be a community interest and fulfil our interest of it being retained as a community building

Councillor Ian Albert informed Members that they will keep the committee informed and will have regular updates about this.

88 GRANTS & COMMUNITY UPDATE

Danny Pearson, Community Engagement Officer, presented the report gave a verbal presentation, which included:

- We have been processing grants to utilise the Health Protection board funding to assist communities recovering after the pandemic.
- The PoetsIn grant from last meeting received over £15,022 from the Health Protection Board Fund and will be rolling out their programme for young and old
- We have been running surgeries in North Herts and we will be in Churchgate if it is raining but in the town square if it is sunny.
- We have various network groups going on. Youth action, food provision and the westmill group as well. We are partnered with the North Herts Strategy Partnership group now which is helpful. We have been engaging with youth and the groups that work with them, the arts and culture group was also very good.
- We gave a presentation for North Herts CVS that had their AGM at the town hall. Before that it was a Ukrainian refugee webinar which was well attended and available to watch on YouTube. We gave information on the work North Herts is doing for all refugees, and Hitchin is leading the way
- Next year it will be 50 years since Bob Marley played at the town hall. We want to put on a concert with a tribute act. At the very least we want to do a temporary plaque to mark the occasion.
- We are continuing to share information through a mailing list and we are in touch with the community on social media
- There has been a spike in anti-social behaviour in Letchworth and Hitchin. Some of the Councillors are working closely with the police and we are working closely with the market team and BID team on this
- Local Democracy week is spanned over many weeks before and after the October half term. It was a slow uptake but now we have loads and Hitchin and Letchworth schools have been very receptive. We want to continue doing this throughout the year
- We are gathering speakers for a community cabinet panel. We are doing this one on the cost of living.
- The BID were unable to show the Queens funeral and North Herts Council couldn't hire the screen. We contacted many places in Hitchin and venues stepped in to show it for those who were vulnerable etc
- The snowman trail, which was in London and Birmingham, has been funded but they needed our local knowledge. We have picked out 12 locations and selected a school to have a workshop. We have also suggested a charity and local artist. The museum and library will also do workshops. The Hitchin band will do a live theatrical show.
- There is an update of home is where the heart is. The exhibition was a massive success and has extended its run. A lot of people opened up and talked about issues

within the community. We will have the same exhibition at Holy Saviour Church in November.

Councillor Judi Billing commented that she was glad the exhibition is extending. In addition to the school visits Councillor Tom Plater introduced a theatre company that wanted to do some workshops on democracy. They will be doing on in Holwell school and Whitehill school.

Councillor Ian Albert informed Members there was a meeting tomorrow about the Willow tree. The Council will be funding a replacement tree. There is a question about whether it should be a memorial for the Queen or something more formal at the tree planting but this will be discussed with the Church tomorrow. He also mentioned the oil in the river and that the environmental agency is involved.

Following a vote, it was:

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

REASON FOR DECISION:

- (1) To ensure the Members are kept informed of the work of the Community Engagement Team
- (2) This report intended to inform Members of the financial resources available. It draws attention to the current budgetary situation by assisting in the effective financial management of the budgets. 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.

89 WARD MATTERS AND OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS - MEMBERS' REPORTS

Members gave updates on the following Ward Matters and Outside Organisations:

Councillor Ian Albert reminded Members that the consultation around closing the high street is still open

90 POSSIBLE AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

The Chair advised that the following items were due to be included at the next meeting

- Churchgate
- Charnwood house
- Air quality

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

Tuesday, 11th October, 2022

The Chair also reminded Members that the next meeting is on Thursday 8th December 2022

The meeting closed at 9.20 pm

Chair

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**HITHCIN AREA COMMITTEE
8 DECEMBER 2022**

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF INFORMATION NOTE : Churchgate Shopping Centre update

INFORMATION NOTE OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - ENTERPRISE

EXECUTIVE MEMBER EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENTERPRISE AND ARTS

PRIORITY SUSTAINABILITY AND A BRIGHTER FUTURE TOGETHER

1. SUMMARY

1.1 To provide Members an update on Churchgate Shopping Centre

2. INFORMATION TO NOTE

2.1 As mentioned in the September information note the Council acquired the Churchgate Shopping Centre on 1 August 2022.

2.2 The Council appointed Brown & Lee Chartered Surveyors to manage Churchgate Shopping Centre on the Council's behalf for a period of 2 years from 1st August 2022. The Council's Estates department met with Brown & Lee in August shortly following acquisition to discuss broad management objectives and principles for the property. Since August, frequent dialogue has focused on setting out and implementing a more detailed estate management strategy. The letting and management of each unit within Churchgate has been jointly reviewed culminating in the Council issuing Brown & Lee instructions to address matters raised. Instructions include:

- To market vacant units with a view to achieving market level income as appropriate.
- To formalise occupation arrangements where occupiers are holding over. Such arrangements include tenancies at will. The objective is to maintain control of the estate.
- To implement practical remedies to address rent and service charge arrears.
- To consider opportunities to improve income levels and sustain income.
- To deploy strategies to minimise holding costs and maximise management efficiencies.
- To identify and carry out essential repairs.

2.3 Prior to acquisition of the head leasehold interest in Churchgate, the Council commissioned BNP Paribas Real Estate to provide a technical due diligence report. This report advised on the general condition and state of repair of the property and provided indicative cost estimates for repair items. The report set out a risk rated summary of the repairs identified together with recommended actions. The report has been studied by the Council and Brown & Lee. The Council has instructed Brown & Lee to clarify apportionment of responsibility for the repairs between the Council as landlord and the

tenants. Brown & Lee is instructed to appoint the relevant contractors to carry out the repairs for which the landlord is responsible as soon as possible.

- 2.4 The Council's long-term aspiration of the shopping centre is to regenerate this area. The Council has recently agreed the commencement of the new Churchgate Project and held the first Project Board meeting on 7 November 2022 where it approved the first two steps which are the Project Trigger and Project Start Up. These steps are required to ensure the relevant documents are in place for the project to commence. This board will be responsible for investigating this site and the surrounding areas to explore what options there are. The next Project Board is due to take place week commencing 9 January 2023, one of the tasks that will be presented to the board is the Comms plan which will set out a programme of engagement including public exhibitions.
- 2.5 A key element of this project is to ensure we consult with the public and fully understand what their thoughts are with regards the future of this area. As part of this the first survey is being launched this week (5 December) and will be available till 31 January 2023.
- 2.6 A report will be presented to Full Council on 19 January 2023 setting out the short, medium and long term approach for the asset and how the project will be managed. This will include a draft project plan and draft communications plan which will outline how the Council will consult with the public.

3. NEXT STEPS

- 3.1 To ensure Councillors and the public are kept up to date on the progress of this site and the project, regular updates will be provided to this committee.

4. APPENDICES

- 4.1 None

5. CONTACT OFFICERS

- 5.1 Steve Crowley, Service Director – Enterprise, (steve.crowley@north-herts.gov.uk /ext 4211)

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 6.1 None

HITCHIN COMMITTEE 8th December 2022

*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: GRANTS & COMMUNITY UPDATE

REPORT OF: THE POLICY & COMMUNITIES MANAGER

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

CURRENT COUNCIL PRIORITIES: PEOPLE FIRST, SUSTAINABILITY, A BRIGHTER FUTURE TOGETHER

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Committee considers allocating funding from their discretionary community budget towards the projects below:
- 2.2 **£920** to NCT (National Childbirth Trust) North Herts towards funding for their breastfeeding and postnatal support group as outlined in 8.1.1-8.1.8 of the officer's report.
- 2.3 **£1,424** to The North Herts African and Caribbean Community towards funding to provide a year of free and some subsidised events and activities for the whole community to attend and learn about African and Caribbean History and Culture as outlined in 8.1.9-8.1.15 of the officer's report.
- 2.4 **£1,200** to Samaritans of North Herts and Stevenage towards funding for their Samaritans National Walk 2023 as outlined in 8.1.16-8.1.20 of the officer's report.
- 2.5 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 Members are 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 Grants Policy as agreed by Cabinet in July 2021.
- 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. Delay decisions until the Committee meets in person, which is not considered the best option as many community organisations rely on such Grants.

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.
- 7.2 Members are asked to note the information detailed in Appendix 1. Hitchin Area Committee Budget spreadsheet, which relates to the Area Committee budget balances for 2022/23. The spreadsheet also details pre-allocated sums carried forward from the previous financial years, including balances and past expenditure.

- 8. **RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS** - Councillors are at liberty to consider any amount requested in a grant application as long as the Hitchin area committee has sufficient funds in the 2022/2023 budget.

8.1 Grant Applications

8.1.1

Applicant	NCT (National Childbirth Trust) North Herts
Project	Breastfeeding and postnatal support group
Sum requested	£920
Total project cost	£920
Match funding	None
Previous support	Yes, £920 from the Letchworth Committee in September
NHDC Policy met	Yes
Council objectives	People First A Brighter Future Together

8.1.2 NCT North Herts would like to apply for funding for their breastfeeding and postnatal support group. Groups are held across Hitchin and Letchworth using halls/venues/community centres. The group they would like to apply for funding for is held at Christchurch, Bedford Road, Hitchin.

8.1.3 Each group is run by an NCT qualified breastfeeding counsellor, who is paid, not a volunteer. It is free of charge and is open to everyone who wishes to attend. The groups provide vital support to new mums and dads who may be experiencing feeding issues with their babies, but also offers parents a social situation in which to meet others and discuss any post-natal issues. Attending a group can often help a new mum to breastfeed for significantly longer than they might have without their support, or to feel less isolated.

8.1.4 The sessions are not new, they have been running an infant feeding session first in Baldock now in Hitchin for a number of years, including virtually during lockdowns. Each session costs the branch money – as they must cover the cost of the breastfeeding counsellor and room hire. Usually, they cover these costs via donations and fundraising, however as they have been unable to fundraise for the past two years due to the pandemic and restrictions on fundraising, their reserves have become significantly depleted. A similar project funded by a recent grant award from the Letchworth Committee has already proven successful.

8.1.5 Their first aid courses, a good source of income for the branch, re-started in July, and they managed to run a successful Nearly New Sale this March, with a second one in October. These fundraising events helped increase their reserves but securing funding for these vital infant feeding sessions for the next year will enable them to rebuild reserves to secure the future of the sessions once the funding has been spent.

8.1.6 All local breastfeeding support provided locally is done so free of charge. New parents, particularly breastfeeding mums will benefit from this activity. They know there is a need,

as this is an already established activity that is attended regularly by new parents. Approximately 60 new parents have attended one of their sessions in Hitchin.

8.1.7 They let the local community know about their sessions in the following ways:

- Through their antenatal class teachers
- Via Facebook
- Via their email newsletter, which gets sent to around 1,300 people
- Via the Health visitors/family centres
- Via events they hold throughout the year

8.1.8 Their infant feeding support group meets the Council Objectives of 'People first' and 'A brighter future together', as they recognise the importance of supporting new parents and families from the very start, offering support to help babies thrive, and putting families at the heart of what they do.

8.1.9

Applicant Project	The North Herts African and Caribbean Community Providing a year of free and some subsidised events and activities for the whole community to attend and learn about African and Caribbean History and Culture
Sum requested	£1,424
Total project cost	£3,675
Match funding	£251 Current Account Contents £2,000 Tickets for Community Events
Previous support	Yes, in 2020
NHDC Policy met	Yes
Council objectives	People First A Brighter Future Together

8.1.10 As part of their Beyond Black History Month project, they would like to provide a year of free and some subsidised events and activities for the whole community to attend and learn about African and Caribbean History and Culture. These events would include,

8.1.11 • "Mind Your Black" Mental Health Creative Writing and Mindfulness workshops focused on discussing the effects of Racial Discrimination, Crime and Crime Prevention on the African and Caribbean community. The talks will invite the public and professionals to come together and work in groups to discuss the issues.

8.1.12 • Celebration and research events designed to bring people from African Diaspora cultures together to discuss issues that affect their particular minority group. They hope to invite local stakeholders to re-establish links between the professionals and people. They hope to empower the community to have a voice within local decision making discuss ways to improve issues that impact the North Herts community as a whole. Events will be ticketed to support with costs of entertainment following the group discussions.

8.1.13 • Black History and Culture Talks. A series of themed Black History and Culture talks. They hope to hold these in the community and through workshops to enable attendees to discuss the topics in mixed groups, within a supportive environment.

8.1.14 • Windrush Arts and Crafts week. They will lead a group of children and young people in a creative project that will see us produce an art installation in honour of the HMT Empire Windrush. In 1948 the Windrush brought one of the first large groups of post-war West Indian immigrants to the UK. The participants will be taught about the history of the Windrush generation, with direct first-person accounts of their experiences coming to the “Mother Country”. The installation will be displayed at an annual fundraiser for the North Herts. African and Caribbean Lunch Club. They hope to run this activity in partnership with the North Herts Museum and the Hitchin Library.

8.1.15 They have also approached the Letchworth Area Committee for £1,424.

8.1.16

Applicant Project	Samaritans of North Herts and Stevenage
Sum requested	The Samaritans National Walk 2023 - Providing the support for a national fund-raising event for the charity.
Total project cost	£1,200
Match funding	£2,400
Previous support	£1,200 from reserves, fundraising from Grants and street collections.
NHDC Policy met	None
Council objectives	Yes
	People First
	A Brighter Future Together

8.1.17 The Samaritans service is anonymous, and this region is one of the more populated, and hence by generating more funds for the branch they can supply more listening volunteers and more hours of availability, which can reduce waiting times. Sadly, people do have to wait for a Samaritan Listening volunteer at many times of the day, the more stations available and the more volunteers would reduce this.

8.1.18 The Samaritans National Walk 2023, provides the support for a national fund-raising event for the charity. Most of the functionality will be provided by volunteer actions. The local branch based on Nuns Close, Hitchin, and the national charity will benefit from this fund-raising event. The event is planned for July 1st, 2023, and will take place across Hitchin and surrounding area.

8.1.19 Samaritans central charity will be sharing the information and it will be on several social media platforms. NHC also plan to work more closely with The Samaritans going forward and we will also be able to share details about their service and future events.

8.1.20 The walk is open to all national branches (200), this funding will generate funds to pay for the walk and any excess will go towards the NH&S Branch funds. Individuals will often be sponsored, and they can choose who their sponsorship goes to Central office, their branch or other charities.

8.2 Community Engagement Update and previous grants awarded

8.2.1 Community Engagement Team

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

- To celebrate Local Democracy Week and Parliament Week in October/November, the team developed youth democracy activities for Keystage 2 primary school children. Councillors and members of the team have been visiting schools for assemblies and Q&A sessions.
- Facilitating the NHC Councillors' Community Surgeries. Also exploring the idea of themed Town Talks moving forward. For example, the next Hitchin Town Talk will be focusing on the Churchgate public consultation.
- Supporting various local and district wide Network Groups such as the Westmill Network Group, Jackmans Network Group, the Grange Network Group, Youth Action, Food Provision, Arts and Culture and the newly resurrected Green and Growing Group.
- The team are co-ordinating an event for Holocaust Memorial Day which will be on 27th January 2023.
- The team helped co-ordinated the Letchworth Remembrance Day event which was held on 13th November 2022.
- Continuing to share and disseminate information on social media and to mailing lists, keeping in touch with the community, voluntary, statutory, and non-statutory agencies.
- Attending JAG (Joint Action Group) and SAG (Safety Advisory Group) meetings to pass on and share information.
- Sharing information to Community contacts that can help with the current 'Cost of Living Crisis' and sharing information about local 'Warm Hubs'.
- Delivering and promoting 'The Snowman Trail' to North Herts. Snowman sculptures were installed on November 17th (working closely with *Wild in Art*, *Hitchin Bid* and *Cala Homes*). Local artist, Sarah Graham, was asked to decorate one of the snowmen statues.

8.2.2 Update on Previous Grants Awarded

- **Hitchin Allotments – Tool Loan Scheme – update**

Hitchin Allotments Association was awarded £800 for the purchase of a tool store and tools which they will loan out to new allotment tenants.

Hitchin allotments – ‘The tool loan scheme has been set up and advertised, gardening and DIY tools bought including a new strimmer. They have been used already, especially the strimmer which is very popular for new plot holders clearing their plots. The garden tools have also been used for the volunteering activities we have been doing including supporting Hitchin Youth Allotment which is expanding and renovating its plots ready for taking on more users in the Spring. The tools are a long-term investment and will be used over and over again, over many years.’ - Paul Dee, Secretary of Hitchin Allotments Association



- **‘Home is where the Hert is’ exhibition – Part II**

The exhibition was shown at North Hertfordshire Museum. It proved so popular that it had an extension into September.



'Home is Where the Hert is: Stories from Hertfordshire's British South Asian Community' is an exhibition and documentary featuring local British South Asians and how they challenged conventions of what it means to be brown in a small English town.'

Holy Saviour Church offered their space to showcase the exhibition in the heart of the Hitchin community. The opening night exceeded all expectations, and everyone involved were pleased to see how many people came along to view the exhibition, to hear the speakers and to enjoy one another's company.

Holy Saviour Church - 'May I say on behalf of Holy Saviour Church how much we really enjoyed the opening event. It was a real pleasure to welcome everyone to our church.

We were delighted to have the opportunity to stage this significant exhibition, and it's certainly helping us to further our aim of being a centre for the whole community. I hope it will be the first of many!' – Brian Caswell.

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 July 2021. 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 1. Hitchin Area Committee Budget spreadsheet.
- 10.2 The current 2022/23 base budget is **£11,000**, with **£775** carried forward from the 2021/22 budget. No grants applications were received at the last Hitchin Area Committee meeting. Grants awarded to date total **£3,135** which leaves a budget available of **£8,640**.
- 10.3 The grant applications for this meeting total **£3,544** and if the Members agree the grants outlined in this report this will leave a balance of **£5,096**.

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 None

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. Hitchin Area Committee Budget spreadsheet

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

- 17.1 Author: Danny Pearson, Assistant Community Engagement Officer
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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 July 2021.

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HITCHIN AREA COMMITTEE BUDGET 2022/23

SUMMARY/ TOTALS	Funding	Allocated	Spent	Outstanding	Unallocated Budget				
<u>Budget brought forward from 2021/22</u>	£775	£775	£775	£0	£0				
<u>Budget 2022/23</u>	£11,000	£2,360	£2,360	£0	£8,640				
Total	£11,775	£3,135	£3,135	£0	£8,640				

	Funding		Project	Allocated	Date	Spent	Outstanding	Unallocated	
Funds Brought Forward from 2021/22	£775		Back2Schoolival CIC - volunteering/work experience for students	£775	28-Jun-22	£775	£0		Total Grant £1,035 - £260 allocated from 2022/23 base budget
Total	£775			£775		£775	£0	£0	

	Funding		Project	Allocated	Date Allocated	Spent	Outstanding	Unallocated Budget	Comments
2022/23 Base Budget	£11,000		Back2Schoolival CIC - volunteering/work experience for students	£260	28-Jun-22	£260	£0		Total Grant £1,035 - £775 allocated from 2021/22 carry forward budget
			PoetsIN - Wellbeing workshops	£1,000	28-Jun-22	£1,000	£0		
			Hitchin Fun Club - holiday clubs	£1,100	28-Jun-22	£1,100	£0		
Total	£11,000			£2,360		£2,360	£0	£8,640	

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