

7b REFERRAL FROM HITCHIN COMMITTEE: 2 MARCH 2021 – COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER - HITCHIN BRIDGE CLUB

NB: To be taken with Item 8

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET: That Cabinet provides its decision in principle to grant a leasehold interest in land at Cadwell Lane, Hitchin to Hitchin Bridge Club as per Recommendation 2.1 in the report due to be considered by Cabinet on 16 March 2021.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION: To ensure that Hitchin Committee is able to comment on the report entitled Community Asset Transfer – Hitchin Bridge Club.

The Senior Estates Surveyor presented the report entitled “Community Asset Transfer – Hitchin Bridge Club” along with the appendices:

- Community Asset Transfer - Hitchin Bridge Club - Report due to be considered by Cabinet - NHDC CR Estates - 18th Jan 2021
- Appendix A - Site plan of NHDC’s freehold recreation ground
- Appendix B - Site plan of HBC’s proposed lease demise
- Appendix C - HBC’s expression of interest.docx
- Appendix D - Comments from HBC members on benefits of playing bridge
- Appendix E -HBC and its relationship with Hitchin, the local and wider community
- Appendix F - Membership breakdown of HBC
- Appendix G - HBC during Covid-19 lockdown
- Appendix H - NHDC’s insight on Community Asset Transfer request by HBC
- Appendix I - Equality Analysis
- Appendix J - Environmental Impact Assessment

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Sam Collins
- Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb
- Councillor Paul Clark
- Councillor Richard Thake

Some Members who also sat on the Planning Control Committee advised that they would not participate in the debate or any vote on this item.

The Chair invited Margaret Eddleston, Hitchin Bridge Club, to address the Committee. Margaret Eddleston gave a presentation including:

- The report presented by the officer contains three proposals, and Hitchin Bridge Club was seeking to recommend that the first of these proposals was actioned;
- A long leasehold on premises for the Bridge Club was the desired option and the limited availability of property on lease was hampering the development of the club;
- If an agreement in principle in support of proposal 1 was given by the Council the Bridge Club could take immediate steps to instruct an architect, apply for planning permission, draft a lease agreement, make funding applications, in line with a detailed business plan;
- The Bridge Club intended to commence a Members’ Loan Scheme to raise capital and many of the other services involved in the plan would be provided by club members on a pro bono basis;

- External funding for projects that alleviate loneliness, benefit mental health and promote social cohesion would be forthcoming for a project like this;
- It was unclear why the Community Asset Transfer Policy had been engaged instead of the general power of disposal under S123 Local Government Act 1972 which would have been a preferable option for the Bridge Club;
- The update submitted to the Committee on life as a virtual bridge club have shown increased participation and demand for the club, and also highlight the necessity of physical meetings;
- Other presentations to the Committee had shown the need for premises in Hitchin and the role that co-operation with the Council plays in providing valuable services to the community.

The Chair thanked Margaret Eddleston for her presentation.

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

- Councillor Simon Harwood
- Councillor Richard Thake
- Councillor Keith Hoskins
- Councillor Martin Stears-Handscorn
- Councillor Ian Albert

In response to questions Margaret Eddleston advised:

- The Bridge Club required purpose built accommodations, as did the Band and other community groups; they could not reasonably share a space. Clubs with different activities only routinely shared facilities in a limited fashion;
- The Bridge Club had been looking for accommodation for over 10 years and generating funds for the project every year, with a significant figure in reserve to use meaning fundraising was not starting from nowhere;
- Delaying this project would not benefit the club or the community.

It was:

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET: That Cabinet provides its decision in principle to grant a leasehold interest in land at Cadwell Lane, Hitchin to Hitchin Bridge Club as per Recommendation 2.1 in the report due to be considered by Cabinet on 16 March 2021.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION: To ensure that Hitchin Committee is able to comment on the report entitled Community Asset Transfer – Hitchin Bridge Club.

NB: The report considered by Hitchin Committee at the meeting held on 2 March 2021 can be viewed at Minute 53 here:

<https://democracy.north-herts.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=147&MId=2449&Ver=4>