

**7c REFERRAL FROM HITCHIN COMMITTEE: 2 MARCH 2021 – WARD MATTERS AND OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS - MEMBERS' REPORTS (COMMUNITY SPACE IN HITCHIN)**

***RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:***

- (1) That consideration be given to the need for community space in Hitchin for a number of organisations, including Hitchin Band, Citizens Advice North Herts and Hitchin Bridge Club;
- (2) That Officers be encouraged to engage with these groups in order to make initial enquiries regarding need and future options that may be available.

***REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION:*** To promote the development of local organisations which provide benefits to the Hitchin community.

Mr Keith Birch – Hitchin Band presented their paper entitled “A permanent home for Hitchin Band” and highlighted the following:

- Hitchin Band had been established and representing the town for 155 years at competitions and concerts;
- 35% of its members were women and it had an average age of 42 with a growing number of young members;
- They had a successful Championship section which competed on the national and international stage in competitive brass band events;
- The Hitchin Youth Brass Band was formed in 2009 providing tuition to children, outreach in schools, with a subscription of very low subscription fee to maximise accessibility;
- Youth Band members have progressed on to the senior band section or have joined the Community Brass section which provides a forum for members to play music without the pressure of a competitive environment;
- Hitchin Band represents the town, provides entertainment, and has a worldwide reach online, and raises money for other charities as well as providing education and skills development for members;
- The Band required suitable premises that could accommodate their storage needs and sound proofing requirements;
- With adequate space the Band could expand to have two youth groups and an intermediate contest band to bridge the gap between the youth section and the senior band which many members find difficult;
- Hitchin Band has been in dialogue with other brass bands of a similar kind which have had success in finding suitable premises to address these issues;
- The Band had been based at Hitchin Rugby Club for over 13 years which was more comfortable than some previous accommodations – with heating and toilets – but was not perfect for their needs;
- The Rugby Club was also planning to move;
- The Band needed a home to accommodate use 3 to 4 nights a week with storage, rehearsal space, and noise dampening;
- Rental options were not felt to be viable; lack of certainty for the future of the band was hampering progress;
- The options which had been considered in detail were purpose building a site or conversion of an existing building;

- Amersham Brass Band, a similar organisation to Hitchin Band, had success raising around £1 million in 5 years to purpose build their premises, and it was felt that Hitchin Band could achieve similar results;
- Key to fundraising would be finding a building available for long term lease as an option on a site would form the focus of fundraising;
- The Band requested the Council to consider whether a suitable plot of land or an existing site was available.

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

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

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*NB: The documents considered by Hitchin Committee at the meeting held on 2 March 2021 can be viewed at Minute 48 here:*

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