

VIRTUAL MEETING OF MEMBERS OF HITCHIN COMMITTEE
June 15th - 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 Members on the current expenditure and balances of the Committee Grant budgets.
- 1.2 To bring to the Members' attention 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 members recommend to the Executive Member for Community Engagement, (in consultation with the Service Director Legal and Community) to allocate the following funding from the discretionary community budget:

£2,185 to Hitchin Festival to assist with creating a week-long series of events in the Dell Open Air Theatre at Woodside as outlined in paragraph 8.1.1 of the officer's report.

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. It draws attention to the current budgetary situation by assisting in the effective financial

management of 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.

- 3.3 Following the cessation of the Flexibility of Meeting Regulations 2020 Committees are required to physically meet should they wish to legally participate and make decisions. As this meeting is being held on a virtual platform, with no Chair or Vice Chair having been appointed at the Annual Council Meeting, no decisions can be made and any decisions on whether to award financial assistance to voluntary organisations and the use of discretionary spending needs to be via a recommendation to the Executive Member for Community Engagement in consultation with the Service Director, Legal and Community.

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.
- 4.2. Or, to consider the options proposed as detailed within the text of this report, to assist the Executive Member for Community Engagement in understanding the express wishes of the Members. In the course of the debate, 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.
- 5.3 As this meeting has no decision-making powers, the members are being consulted on its views as to whether to award funding to the project as outlined in paragraph 8.1.1 and to subsequently recommend to the Executive Member for Community Engagement.

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 2021/22. 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 Project	HITCHIN FESTIVAL Creating a week-long series of events in The Dell Open Air Theatre at Woodside.
Sum requested	£2,185
Total project cost	£23,270
Match funding	£1,585 Crowdfunding £8,000 Donations from local businesses
Previous support	£1,880 in 2013
NHDC Policy met	Yes
Council objectives	Be a more welcoming and inclusive Council Build thriving and resilient communities Respond to challenges to the environment

The Hitchin Festival produces a yearly arts festival throughout the town of Hitchin each July. It brings together community groups, businesses and individuals as well as producing several of its own events. Hitchin Festival was established in March 1991.

The money will be spent on creating a week-long series of events in The Dell Open Air Theatre at Woodside. This is a space that was created by the council back in 1951 for performance and there has been a huge desire from the community to get the space up and running as a venue again.

In the 70th year since its creation and with outdoor venues seeing a resurgence because of Covid-19, there has never been a better time to see this beloved part of Hitchin restored and used again in the way it was intended. The Dell is situated next to the Queen Mother Theatre at Woodside in Hitchin. The planned events will take place daily from Saturday 24th July – Saturday 31st July.

The funding will be used towards hire of staging and technical equipment and to ensure the space remains safe and secure, with fencing and security present throughout the duration. In order to keep costs low, many performers are giving their time for as little as possible or in some cases for free, and they have involved a number of local groups and societies, including The Bancroft Players, Hitchin Thespians, Hitchin Rock Choir and Club 85.

The aim is that this year's event will not just be a one-off but an opportunity to show the community what can be achieved and hopefully start to create a vision for a longer-term plan that would see it be used as an outdoor theatre every summer.

The programme of events is advertised across Hitchin and the surrounding towns and villages through the Hitchin Festival. It will have a maximum capacity of 200 per performance. They expect approx. 1,500 audience members across the week. This number does not take into account all those volunteering or performing too, which comes

to approximately 200. The Festival Box Office operates from The Town Centre Information Office in Hitchin and has a close connection with Hitchin BID and the Hitchin Initiative.

Promotion for the Hitchin Festival is already underway via social media and The Hitchin Festival is producing a programme this year in association with Hitchin BID to ensure it has maximum coverage. Approx. 15,000 copies will be delivered door to door in Hitchin and the surrounding villages. Events will be on sale through the festivals online box office as well as in person through the Hitchin Information Centre in Churchyard, Hitchin. The event is already being publicised through a crowdfunding campaign set up to help with running costs and the programme will be promoted through the longstanding Hitchin Festival (see <https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/thedellatwoodsideopenairtheatre>).

Most of the money (after expenses) from ticket sales will go back into paying for the event. All evening events will require entry by prepaid ticket but prices for tickets are being kept low and affordable to all.

The opening of the Dell will benefit a large section of the community as they have planned events to target all ages. They have children's creative workshops and performances, live music for teens and several musical concerts and performances suitable for families of all ages. After a year of being unable to perform, those groups and individuals involved will benefit from the opportunity to do what they love in an open-air space. It is also a great chance to showcase the talent and creativity on offer in Hitchin and the surrounding area.

In future years, and hopefully with a longer run, they plan to open the programme up to an even wider variety of groups and truly celebrate the arts and entertainment on offer in the community.

The support of the council in providing an open-air space for Hitchin will be greatly appreciated by so many. They are already seeing the enthusiasm from local creatives, community groups and audiences who cannot wait to perform or see a performance in the space again. This project is a huge collaborative effort between creative individuals and community groups, and they hope that this is just the start in bringing the arts in Hitchin together like this to strengthen links for the future.

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.
- 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.

- Investigating the possibility of conducting face to face councillor surgeries again in line with Covid 19 health and safety concerns and current government guidelines.
- Facilitating virtual Hitchin Councillors' Surgeries via Zoom.
- Facilitating virtual Hitchin Town Talks via Zoom.
- Gathering speakers and information for the Cabinet Panel for Community Engagement and Co-operative Development.
- Continuing to work with, and add to, the Arts Cooperative which was set up after the Hitchin Arts and Culture Town Talk.
- Liaising with Ravidassia Community Centre – making sure their kitchen project is back on track after the halt in work due to the pandemic.
- Monitoring and updating funding agreements with key partners, North Herts Centre for Voluntary Service, Citizens Advice and North Herts Minority Ethnic Forum.

8.2.2 Update on Previous Grants Awarded

- Getting Rooted - 'Ron's Plot' Community Allotment Garden
The Community Allotment Garden, Getting Rooted, received £1,070 from Hitchin committee in March this year. This has helped them provide training and support for local schools, community groups and home education networks. They have been able to start, or improve, permaculture designed outdoor educational settings within their own communities and bubbles with their community allotment 'Ron's Plot' as a learning hub and an example of good practice.

With additional funding to train additional mentors and develop and improve their community provision at their community allotment, they have created 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 their volunteers are already involved in other green projects which they share e.g. litter picking to encourage others. They 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 engagements with the communities they work with.

They are continuing to develop their own horticulture enterprise by growing surplus seedlings and plants to sell on to the local community. They would also like to be able to create new job opportunities by training up their own mentors to run workshops on site and online with enabling and empowering their own local communities in mind.

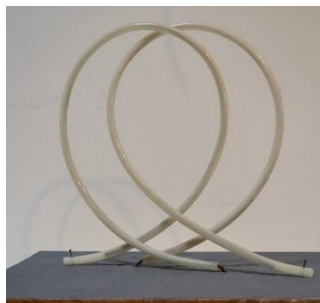
During partial school closures they shared outdoor learning activities locally and nationally via social media to encourage families outdoors for their mental and physical wellbeing.

The green house / classroom in the photo below was funded in part by £10k last year from a Community Facilities Capital Grant.



Burford Way Allotments - 'Ron's Plot' Community Allotment Garden

- African Caribbean Seniors & Carers Luncheon Club – update from Thelma Levy
The club have received their funding from the Coronavirus Support Grant - 'On behalf of the African Caribbean Seniors & Carers Luncheon Club, I would like to say thank you for your time and effort in helping the group to achieve the funding for the electronic tablets, the treasurer will be viewing these tablets soon and will be purchasing them for the group thank you.'
- Quaker Meeting House – update from Chris Kell
An update of where the Unity Sculpture project is - 'We are in the throes of trying to find a date for filming a short video to go on a crowdfunding site for the Peace Garden sculpture. But we are still at it. Once we have the film, we will post the crowdfunding page. I will keep you informed.'



Unity sculpture model photo

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 Usually the Chair and Vice Chair of the various Area Committees would have been elected following the Annual Council meeting. However, due to the pandemic and issues regarding the maximum number of people that could be accommodated within the Council Chamber the appointments did not take place.
- 9.2 Until the Area Committees have convened 'in person' and the respective Chairs and Vice Chairs elected they are not able to be consulted for the purposes of delegated decisions for grant aid/financial support.
- 9.3 Therefore an amendment has been made to 9.8.2 and 14.6.8 (b) (iii) of the Constitution on 1 June 2021¹, to enable the Executive Member for Community Engagement to continue to make delegated decisions – *'The Executive Member for Community Engagement, having consulted the Chair or Vice Chair of the relevant Area Committee, or where no Chair or Vice Chair – the Members of the Area Committee by majority or those responding, or confirming via virtual means, and Service Director: Legal and Community; of on recommendation of Grants Panel'*.
- 9.4 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. However, if the Members of the Committee meets on a virtual or partly virtual platform, such decisions cannot be made and instead the Members must make a recommendation, as per 9.3 above, to the Executive Member for Community Engagement, in consultation with the Service Director Legal and Community to allocate the funding from the respective budget.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 As outlined in Appendix A - Hitchin Area Committee budget sheet 2021/22.
- 10.2 At the end of the 2020/21 financial year, the carry forward budget was £3,465 of which £2,000 has been allocated to the Peace Garden Sculpture project pending further funding being secured. This leaves an unallocated carry forward budget of £1,465. The budget for 2021/22 is £11,000 providing a total of £12,465 to allocate this year.
- 10.3 The grant applications for this meeting total £2,185 and if the Members agree to recommend the award of this sum to the Executive Member for Community Engagement, this will leave a balance of £10,280.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

¹ [Delegated Decision to amend the Constitution 1 June 2021](#)

- 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. Relating to Hitchin Festival creating a week-long series of events in The Dell Open Air Theatre at Woodside. The organisers are encouraging people who live close by (Hitchin residents) to walk to the outdoor venue. There is a footpath leading from the car park to the proposed site that will be used when transporting stage equipment, chairs, etc.
- 14.2 The area is currently in a state of disrepair and is known for antisocial behaviour – Fires, drug taking etc. The funding should go some way into helping clean up this area and to make it more secure for the rest of the community to use over the weeks and into the future. The fencing would also stop people from attempting to enter the wooded areas and would help in protecting the local wildlife. The organisers have also put measures in place to make sure that after every event that all litter is picked up and disposed of. Visitors will also be asked to make sure they pick up any rubbish they may have dropped. A 'leave no trace' approach.
- 14.3 Reclaiming this area from a state of disrepair to one of a more useable community space benefits the area and provides more opportunities for community groups and local people.

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 – 2021/22 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.