

North Herts Council
HITCHIN AREA FORUM

Meeting held at Hitchin Town Hall

On 30 January 2024 at 7.30pm

NOTES

Present:

In attendance Claire Morgan (Community and Partnerships Team Leader) Cllr Ian Albert (Chair) IA, Cllr Keith Hoskins KH, Cllr Richard Thake RT, Cllr David Winstanley DW, Cllr Elizabeth Dennis ED, Cllr Clare Billing (Vice Chair) CB, Cllr Val Bryant VB, Nigel Mason NM, Cllr Daniel Wright-Mason DWM

Also Present:

Cllr Ruth Brown RB Executive Member for Planning and Transport, Tom Hardy TH - Hitchin Business Improvement District (BID) Manager and 8 Members of the public including grant applicants.

1. Chair's Announcements

Cllr Albert welcomed everyone in attendance.

- Highlighted that it's an informal, inclusive meeting to share ideas.
- Members were reminded they are making recommendations and not decisions for grant applications.

2. Apologies for Absence – none

3. Minutes of Area Committee 2nd March 2023

Proposed by IA and Seconded by RT – unanimously agreed.

4. Public Participation - Tom Hardy BID Manager

- Following the successful BID renewal ballot. Until 31 March 2029
- Events – creating a pack for businesses to run their own events.
- Working in partnership with Royston and Letchworth BID managers to bid for UKSPF funding, liaising with Andrew Figgis NHC Economic Development Officer.
- BID taking over the Hitchin Information Centre – will look at new products and services.
- Early stages of starting a charity to allow residents to financially contribute to projects and initiatives for the town centre.
- Going ahead with town centre floral displays again.
- The fixings for bunting is failing, considering putting in an application for grant funding from the Community Budget to replace.
- They are now trading as 'Visit Hitchin' the branding will be starting to change.
- Working on a cookbook
- Christmas trading was tough, dwell time would have been improved with pay on exit car parking.
Cllr RB says NHC are looking at roll out of tap in, tap out payment for car parking. Over the next 18 months to 2 years.
Cllr CB has a good map of accessible routes around the town centre that she will give to TH.

4.1 **Friends of Whitehill and Highbury School grant** – Karen Grant

Requesting **£2,000** towards funding football goals.

NM – Support a fantastic facility.

Cllr Albert want the CP team to let schools to know in their areas that funding is available to PTA's Friends groups.

Cllr RT – proposed.

Cllr KH – seconded.

Voted unanimously to recommend £2,000 to Exec Member.

4.2 **Resolve** – Laura Hyde

Requesting **£1,500** towards drug and alcohol support and counselling services.

Cllr CB asked how they link in with CGL.

CGL are the main funded service by HCC.

CGL refer to Resolve and the Living Room.

What links do they have to mental ill health provision.

You can't get help from groups such as MIND if you're using, so Resolve can offer 48 weeks of free counselling and then refer to other counselling services.

Cllr VB – Came to visit when Count and Countess of Wessex visited, was very impressed with the service and spoke to some of the service users.

Cllr DW – how are you raising larger amounts –

LH Continually approaching trusts and lottery and speaking to HCC commissioners.

Cllr IA – What is the age range?

LH - Adult but most of the clientele are middle aged. 30yrs +

Proposed Cllr CB, Seconded Cllr IA

Unanimous voted to agree to recommend £1,500 to exec Member.

5. **Grant and Community Update**

CM updated on the budget available and confirmed that there was plenty of funding available to cover the applications this evening and for the next meeting on March 5.

- The Community Investment Fund has now closed. There was an oversubscription of three times the amount of allocated funds available, with those scoring highest from initial assessment progressing to recommendation by the panel.
- North Herts Heroes winners were chosen earlier this month. The winners will be celebrated at the Chair's Civic event on 1st March 2024.
- The Community Partnership Team worked with Letchworth BID to help deliver the Letchworth Remembrance Day event.
- Co-ordinating various local and district wide Network Groups including Youth Action, Food Provision, Arts and Culture and Green and Growing Group.
- Continuing to facilitate NHC Councillors' Community Surgeries.

A reshuffle of Community Partnerships Officers meaning that Aimee Flack now the lead officer focusing on Hitchin.

She has had introductory meetings with Cllrs, local initiatives, groups, and organisations which include:

- Ward walks/meetings with Cllr Hoskins, Cllr Dennis, Cllr Wright-Mason and Cllr Mason.
- Meeting with Secretary of Churches Together in Hitchin.
- Meeting with Hitchin BID Manager.
- Visited Hitchin Food Rescue Hub and due to visit Hitchin Pantry.
- Attended Hitchin Forum AGM meeting.

Also attended local events which include Ron's Plot's - Food for life get-together and Settle's Westmill Place Festival.

The Officer has started chairing our Westmill Network meetings, an opportunity for local residents, groups and initiatives to share updates and discuss projects. Recent updates include a new Free Hertfordshire Health Walk in Westmill. Also Create Community and Settle are working in partnership to have monthly hubs for Settle residents at Westmill Community Centre.

Sharing and disseminating information on social media and to mailing lists, keeping in touch with the community, voluntary, statutory, and non-statutory agencies

6. **Presentation from Cllr RB Exec Member for Planning and Transport**

Apologies from Edward Leigh he couldn't attend as there are no trains today (ironically)

Active travel plans – consultation to provide a plan in case the government provides funding with a short time scale.

There will be some funding coming from the Highover Farm development.

Consultation out now – around Hitchin Town Centre and Nightingale / Triangle area.

Looking at speed cushions in Verulam Road 20 mph.

Meeting with Network Rail to discuss plans for access to Hitchin Station have joined with HCC to do a joint plan – scheme will cost £10 mil upwards.

Busses – meeting with HCC re Bus Service Improvement Plan – government funding to improve – Implement bus routes– 2 routes in Hitchin.

Consultation opens Mid-Feb to Mid-March on HCC website. In person consultation events at British Schools Museum. These will be publicised on North Herts Council social media when we have details from HCC.

Q. Bill Sellick- Hitchin Forum – will there be cushions on Bearton Road?

A. Cllr IA – that is a separate scheme – it has been consulted on and there will be bumps and new crossing.

Why are there not 20mph limits on Whitehill Road?

Cllr RB would like all residential roads to be 20mph.

Bill has 4 questions from Forum members who can't attend this evening.

1. What can be done to rid Hitchin of recycling lorries – Burymead.

ED Hitchin HCC councillors are putting pressure on County.

They still want a link road from industrial area.

RD – Has the northern waste transfer station in the local plan?

RB – it's in the plan for the Baldock expansion., in the industrial area.

2. In the interim could we slow the traffic on Fishponds Road – could there be speed cameras along there.

RB – this is a question for HCC who set the speed management strategy.

RT – the Police work with HCC on the Speed Management Strategy group and they won't allow 20mph speed limits without enforcement / interventions.

Cllr VB – we need to make the roads in Hitchin safe, with the big projects Highways forget about the small improvements that make the roads safe. NHC Councillors feel like they spend a lot of time in Highways meetings discussing roads.

Cllr NM – Cllr CB have done a lot of work for Safer Westmill as there is a lot of speeding around the estate and Mattock Road which is straight through the estate. There is a lot to be done such as large planters that slow the traffic.

Wants to raise the issues of Busses – the routes 80 or 81 will run through the new Highover Estate to Westmill – will people use this to get to the station for

commuters how often do we need the busses to run for commuters to find it useful.

Cllr CB pointed out that the bus no longer goes to the station it goes into town and people must walk to the station.

Cllr Daniel Write-Mason – Who decides how the funding for busses is used?

Cllr RB – It's a S106 from the Highover Farm Development, legal agreement with HCC.

An audience member wants to know about slowing traffic on Westmill could you use rumble strips rather than speed humps to warn people to slow down on Mattock Road.

Cllr RT explained that rumble strips are noise for local residents and would become intolerable to those that live next to the rumble strip.

He thinks that ANRP cameras should be used to prevent speeding.

The Police have the most influence over travel strategies and won't approve them if they can't enforce.

BS – Frequency of journeys in to town by car from south of Hitchin – people don't like walking through the railway bridge as the path is too narrow.

Could there be a barrier such as Perspex to shield the public from the traffic fumes on the path?

Cllr RB thinks that one solution being discussed is, an underpass.

Chair thanked Cllr RB for attending.

Key points – getting comments in for the 20mph consultation and the Busses consultation

Need lots of publicity and social media on those consultations.

7. **Ward Matters** - None

8. **Future Forums** – March 5th Churchgate? 1st choice (or update / consultation)

Culture and Town Centres – run up to Hitchin Festival – Hitchin Creative are taking on the Festival could they provide presentation to the Forum.

Fallback if Churchgate isn't a possibility.

Meeting end: 21.11