

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

HITCHIN COMMITTEE

**MEETING HELD IN THE WESTMILL COMMUNITY CENTRE,
JOHN BARKER PLACE, HITCHIN, HERTS
ON TUESDAY, 6TH MARCH, 2018 AT 7.30 PM**

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors Councillor Ian Albert (Vice-Chairman), Judi Billing, Paul Clark, Elizabeth Dennis, Simon Harwood, Bernard Lovewell, Alan Millard, Ray Shakespeare-Smith, Adrian Smith, Martin Stears-Handscomb and Richard Thake*

In Attendance:

Simon Ellis (Development and Conservation Manager), Claire Morgan (Communities Officer), Milan Johnston (Communities Assistant) and Hilary Dineen (Committee and Member Services Officer)

Also Present:

At the start of the meeting and 10 members of the public.

60 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Nicola Harris (Chairman) and Frank Radcliffe.

61 MINUTES - 5 DECEMBER 2017

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 5 December 2017 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

62 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

No other business had been notified.

63 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

- (1) The Vice-Chairman thanked all who had attended Town Talk;
- (2) The Vice-Chairman welcomed all present at the meeting, particularly those who had attended to give a presentation;
- (3) The Vice-Chairman informed those present that, in accordance with Council Policy the meeting would be audio recorded;
- (4) The Vice-Chairman 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.

64 HERTFORDSHIRE CONSTABULARY

Sergeant Steve Oliphant, Hertfordshire Constabulary thanked the Vice-Chairman for the invitation to address the Committee.

Sergeant Oliphant advised that the statistics and other information covered the Hitchin area.

Statistics

All Crime

- There had been an increase in reports of 22.5 percent (409 reports).

Anti-Social Behaviour

- There had been an increase in reports of 0.02 percent.

Burglary Dwelling

- 114 reports.

Burglary Non-Dwelling

- 77 Reports

Work Undertaken

- It had been a busy year for the Police;
- The main focus of the year had been to reduce burglaries, both dwelling and non-dwelling;
- There had been an increase in Burglary Dwelling in Oughton Ward, an operation was set up and an offender was caught;
- They had also focussed on criminal damage to motor vehicles;
- There had been an increase in wing mirror damage in Bearton Ward, an operation was set up and two young offenders were caught and were being processed through the court system;
- Over Christmas and New Year there had been an increase in the theft of motor vehicles, particularly motor scooters, an operation was set up and the main offender was identified and charged with 16 offences;
- Two people had been arrested and two further people were being monitored in connection with the Zen graffiti tag seen in Hitchin.

Licensing

The Police worked closely with NHDC Licensing and Community Safety Officers to take positive action regarding any breaches of licensing conditions or problems arising at licensed premises, with the aim that everybody could enjoy the nightlife in Hitchin.

Communication

- Communication with and support of the public was important;
- Hertfordshire Constabulary chose not to engage directly with people or groups through individual sites on Facebook;
- The OWL system was very useful and people were encouraged to sign up to it.

Members were pleased that the Zen graffiti offenders had been identified and commented that the work by NHDC to remove the graffiti was ongoing.

They commented that the work being undertaken by the Police to encourage use of the OWL network had been very positively received.

Sergeant Oliphant advised that the OWL network was an important communication tool, which Officers looked at and fed into on a regular basis and that it supported the Safer Neighbourhood Teams.

The Safer Streets campaign was about visiting homes, providing advice on security and encouraging sign up to the OWL system.

Councillor Lovewell informed Members that Herts County Council would shortly be starting an initiative in conjunction with District Councils regarding the crime of fly-tipping.

Fly-tipping was blight on the countryside and cost tax payers a lot of money to clear up.

Recently there had been a number of high profile successful prosecutions for fly-tipping and NHDC worked closely with the Police regarding this crime.

A Member reminded the Committee that graffiti had been a major problem some 10 – 15 years ago and since that time a great deal of work had been undertaken in respect of anti-social behaviour. This spate of graffiti was a resurgence that was being dealt with.

A Member reported that there was a traffic issue at Sun Street where there was a no right turn sign, which was regularly ignored and asked that the Police look into this.

Members commented that the OWL network was very useful and provided helpful information.

Members noted that crime had increased and queried what could be done to address this and asked whether anything could be done regarding the issue of speeding in Hitchin.

Sergeant Oliphant advised that the increase in crime numbers did not overly concern him, although it was the Police's job to try to reduce the amount of crime and help to keep neighbourhoods and residents safe.

Tackling crime could only happen in partnership with residents and everyone involved had to take on this responsibility.

He was concerned about and understood the impact that crime had on people.

The OWL system was a great help to the Police and to local residents and he encouraged people to sign up to the system and to provide any information, whether they thought it relevant or not, which would support them to target and therefore reduce crime.

The biggest threat was criminals who travelled into the County to undertake their crime.

In respect of speeding, a number of County Councillors had provided funding from their Locality Budgets to provide speed information signs with smiley faces and these had had a positive impact.

His team would do whatever they could to reduce speeding, however there were limited resources and officers had to be placed to deal with the biggest risks.

Sergeant Oliphant acknowledged the risks associated with speeding, however the statistics did not demonstrate that this was an increasing problem and there were not in fact that many serious collisions in the Hitchin Urban area.

Members acknowledged that the raw statistics provided were not always helpful as the Home Office kept changing the method of reporting crime which had resulted in an on-paper increase in the volume of crime recorded. Until the reporting system settled down, it would be difficult to make comparisons year on year

They also acknowledged that Hertfordshire was a very safe place to live and that the percentage increases reported were from a low starting point.

Members asked for clarification regarding the additional responsibilities that had been placed on the local Police team.

Sergeant Oliphant advised that there were many reasons for the increase in recorded crime which included that there was an increased confidence in the Police resulting in people being more willing to report crime and the changes in the way that the Police recorded crime,

In terms of responsibilities, they had been successful in tackling issues such as anti-social behaviour and there were now several different methods for people to report crime, these positive developments had resulted in an increase in the amount reported.

The Constabulary were asked to support many other activities and agencies, which resulted in that time not being available in the local area

The Vice-Chairman thanked the Hertfordshire Constabulary for their work in the Hitchin area and Sergeant Oliphant particularly, for his presentation.

65 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - HITCHIN MARKETS

Following the presentation but before any debate Councillor Judi Billing declared a declarable Interest as she was a Director of Hitchin Initiative, which was the sole shareholder of Hitchin Markets.

Following the presentation but before any debate Councillor Ray Shakespeare-Smith declared a declarable Interest as he was a member of Hitchin Initiative, which was the sole shareholder of Hitchin Markets.

Following the presentation but before any debate Councillor Richard Thake declared a declarable Interest as he was a member of Hitchin Initiative, which was the sole shareholder of Hitchin Markets.

Mr John Simmonds, Chairman, Hitchin Markets Limited, thanked the Vice-Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a verbal presentation regarding Hitchin Market.

Mr Simmonds informed the Committee that Hitchin Markets Limited, a social enterprise company, had run Hitchin Market on behalf of the Council since 2008.

He was making the presentation this evening in response to the announcement by NHDC that there were plans to regenerate Churchgate Shopping Centre.

The Churchgate Board was made up of volunteers and Hitchin Market Limited welcomed the idea of a refreshed market and shopping centre.

Running the Market was tough and had not been helped over the last ten years but they had, by local benchmarking, managed to run it successfully.

The Market consists of between 90 and 120 stalls on 4 days of each week.

The indicative NHDC plan relocated the market so that there was a 50 yard gap, which blocked the market in to half the space it was currently using and it put the market 50 yards away from the principle shopping area.

This was the principle objection as the market and the Town Centre were good for each other.

The indicative plan also showed a very limited area for fixed stalls. If the market was to continue in any similar form, it would therefore be necessary to put up around 100 demountable stalls. This was not as easy as it sounded as people had to turn up at 4.30 am to put the stalls up and return in the evening to take them down again.

There were huge running costs involved with looking after and erecting/dismantling demountable stalls amounting to approximately £60,000 per year. One of the reasons for the financial success of Hitchin Markets Limited was the number of fixed stalls that were reliable and did not require personnel to erect and dismantle them.

There was a proposal that the operating contract for Hitchin Markets Limited to expire in July and the operation of Hitchin market be taken back in-house by NHDC during the 2-3 year development period.

Mr Simmonds did not believe that NHDC had the experience to run the market. Hitchin Market Corporate Board had the experience of three experienced traders as well as the experience of Hitchin Initiative, which resulted last year in a surplus profit being made.

This required exceptionally sensitive management as markets were fragile and could easily melt away and be lost. Too many markets had been forced to close including Royston, Stevenage, Letchworth, Hemel Hempstead, Hatfield and Watford.

Hitchin Markets Limited had worked in close partnership with NHDC for 10 years and suggested that the operating contract be extended on a rolling basis.

Their aim was to have a successful market and they were more than willing to work closely and well with NHDC to this end.

Members queried whether Hitchin Markets Limited would wish to continue to manage the market under any circumstances, particularly in light of the concerns he had raised regarding the indicative plans.

Mr Simmonds acknowledged that the market would have to operate within any constraints placed upon it and that Hitchin Markets Limited would be more than willing to try to make it run within those constraints.

A Member reminded the Committee that at the Council meeting, where this was discussed, the professionalism of the current management was discussed as was the suggestion of a rolling contract for Hitchin Markets Limited.

Members commented that the erection and dismantling of the demountable stalls was not a quiet operation and that there were many more residents living within the area of the market and queried whether Hitchin Markets Limited had any concerns regarding this aspect.

Mr Simmonds advised that noise had been a concern when considering previous suggestions regarding the placement of the market, particularly regarding the proposal to spread the market around the Town. The current proposal caused less of a concern regarding noise, but it had to be noted that this was a noisy operation as well as being hard work.

Members queried whether Hitchin Markets Limited had formerly approached the Council with their suggestion of a rolling contract.

Mr Simmonds advised that they had not made any formal approaches, but had received an invitation from the Council to make a formal written representation and he would also be making a representation to Cabinet when it is discussed.

The Vice-Chairman thanked Mr Simmonds for his presentation.

66 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - PARKING AT THE LEISURE CENTRE

Mr Colin Dunham thanked the Vice-Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a verbal presentation regarding parking at the Leisure Centre.

Mr Dunham informed Members that in 2014/15 the Portfolio Holder for Leisure advised that patrons of the Leisure Centre would be able to park in an NHDC car park free of charge.

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He advised that no publicity had been given to this concession and there was no information about it on the NHDC website and as far as he could ascertain, there had been no publicity as, if used, it would destroy the sale of season tickets.

Mr Dunham queried why there had been no publicity regarding the parking alternatives.

Members suggested that Mr Dunham should direct his question to the Executive Member for Leisure who was responsible for the Leisure Centre and its car park.

The Vice-Chairman thanked Mr Dunham for his presentation.

RESOLVED: That the Executive Member for Leisure be asked to advise this Committee how the parking arrangements for the Leisure Centre in Hitchin were publicised and whether there were plans to further publicise those parking arrangements.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure that the parking arrangements for the Leisure Centre in Hitchin are publicised as fully as possible.

67 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - TILEHOUSE COUNSELLING

The Vice - Chairman advised that Sue Barnes, Tilehouse Counselling, had broken her ankle and was unable to attend this meeting.

68 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - TRIANGLE COMMUNITY GARDEN

Ms Liz McElroy, Project Manager, Ms Vicky Wire and Ms Yolande Worrall, Triangle Community Garden, thanked the Vice-Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a verbal presentation regarding their grant application.

Ms McElroy informed Members that the Triangle Community Garden had been based at Ransoms Recreation Ground since 2000.

It was a registered charity that provided social therapeutic horticultural activities for adults with learning disabilities and supported individuals to lead more healthy lifestyles by learning about nutrition, cookery, growing fruit and vegetables and taking exercise.

Through reviews and talking to service users, it became apparent that a lot of the service users had some IT skills but did not get the opportunity to use the skills they had learnt.

Ransoms Pavilion was last decorated in 2010 and 8 years of wear and tear had taken its toll. It was also an opportunity to add some colour to the pavilion walls to help those who were visually impaired.

The equipment would enable the participants to undertake some research for themselves regarding recipes etc and staff and volunteer could also use the equipment for training purposes.

The plan was to purchase a TV monitor that would be placed on a wall and be in a built-in cupboard for security

The Triangle Community Garden was requesting grant funding of £2,850 toward the purchase of IT equipment, a mobile phone and internal decoration and wi-fi for Ransom Pavilion that would cost a total of £4,580.

These purchases and improvements would extend the opportunities available to the service users.

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Ms Wire informed Members that Ransoms Pavilion was a community resource that acted as a very small community centre which was available for hire for meetings and presentations. Having wi-fi and a monitor would enable this community resource to be available and useful to more people.

Two long-term hirers of the Pavilion would be moving out shortly, therefore, if anyone knew of any groups that would like to hire the Pavilion, please contact them.

Ms Worrall informed Members that she supported a lady in her mid 30s who had autism and severe dyslexia meaning that she had real difficulty reading and writing. This lady, who could manage to write her name, had the opportunity to use a laptop, that had been bought in by a member of staff. She showed great interest in the laptop and was able, with some support to type her name and she was thrilled at being able to achieve this.

Members agreed that this was a fantastic, long running project that had supported those with learning difficulties for many years.

The Vice-Chairman thanked Ms McElroy, Ms Wire and Ms Worrall for their presentation.

69 GRANTS AND COMMUNITY UPDATE

Prior to any discussion regarding Hitchin Educational Foundation, Councillor Paul Clark declared a declarable interest as he was the Council's representative on this body. As there was no decision to be made in respect of this organisation, he would remain in the room and take part in any debate.

The Communities Officer presented the report of the Communities Manager entitled Grants and Community Update and drew attention to the following:

Hitchin Stroke Group

Thanks to the generous grant award by this Committee, the Communities Officer was able to gain the support of the local Rotarians, who had agreed to provide the design and printing of new leaflets and posters to advertise the group.

Also, following a meeting, NHCVS were helping the group with a recruitment drive for volunteers.

The group would now be more sustainable for the future.

Funding Advice

There had been a number of groups that NHDC had been unable to help with grant funding, due to the grant criteria, however the Communities Officer had signposted them to their County Councillor, who had provided some funding from their Locality Budget.

Community Facilities Grant Panel

The Panel had held a meeting in January and there were two community facilities in Hitchin that the Panel had recommended grant funding be awarded to.

The recommendation of the Panel would be considered by the Deputy Chief Executive, who would make the final decision.

Budgets and Grant Funding

There had been a large amount carried forward from the 2016/17 budget, therefore 2017/18 budget had only stated to be used at the last meeting.

Following the grant awards this evening the remaining balance was £11,131 and the Communities Officer suggested that Members might like to allocate this sum to Community Initiatives.

Members noted that the 2018/19 budget had been reduced by 30 percent.

Councillor Billing informed Members that the County Councillor's Locality Budgets had been reduced by 50 percent in 2016/17 and that County Councillors could not carry forward any funds to the following year.

She observed that, due to the reduced funding, some County Councillors had been more careful in allocating funds and therefore had not spent all of their allocation.

Councillor Billing reminded Members that, groups and projects in the area could apply for grant funding from their County Councillors and information regarding this could be found on the Hertfordshire County Council website.

The Communities Officer advised that often the effect of budget cuts was that the community thought that there was no longer any money available and asked Councillors to encourage groups to put in funding applications.

The Chairman agreed, as an exception, to allow a member of the public to address the Committee.

Mr Doggett suggested that there should be a forum where all organisations that had grant funds available could share their criteria, that in turn would help grant funding organisations signpost applicants to funding sources.

The Communities Office advised that she did work closely with other grant funders, however she would investigate the possibility of organising a forum for grant funders in the Hitchin area.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the budgetary expenditure, balances and carry forwards from the Development Ward Budgets as set out in Appendix A – Hitchin Area Committee Budget for 2017/18 be noted;
- (2) That the sum of £11,131 be allocated from the 2017/18 Discretionary Budget to Community Initiatives;
- (3) That the Communities Officer be requested to investigate the possibility of organising a forum for grant funders in the Hitchin area;
- (4) That the Committee endorses the actions taken by the Community Officer to promote greater community capacity and well-being for Hitchin;

REASON FOR DECISION: To keep Members of the Committee apprised of the latest developments in community activities in Hitchin.

70 GRANT APPLICATION - TILEHOUSE COUNSELLING

The Communities Officer reminded Members that Sue Barnes had been due to give a presentation this evening but had been unable to attend as she had broken her ankle.

The report contained sufficient information for the Committee to make a decision and she asked that they consider the grant in Ms Barnes' absence.

Many years ago Tilehouse Counselling had a Service Level Agreement with the Council, but they had not received any funding since 2003.

A Member noted that there were many different counselling services in Hitchin and that a number of these had requested grant funding in the past. He queried whether there was any overlap in the types of counselling offered and whether these services could be defined and explained for Councillors at some point in the future.

The Communities Officer advised that, to her recollection only one other counselling service had applied for grant funding from this Committee and that was a drug and alcohol service.

Tilehouse Counselling specialised in counselling for children and young people at either discounted rates or for free.

A Member noted that the varying styles of counselling were needed as the NHS could not meet the demands for adult and children's mental health provision and domestic abuse was an issue that needed support. Tilehouse Counselling was one of the services that helped support women and young people with mental health issues.

Members queried whether all of the clients at Tilehouse Counselling came from Hitchin.

The Communities Officer advised that the majority of clients were from Hitchin.

Members noted that funding was requested to provide a new service that was required to meet a need.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That grant funding of £4,964 be awarded to Tilehouse Counselling from the 2017/18 Discretionary Budget towards the cost of providing weekly one to one counselling sessions for individuals with mental health issues.
- (2) That the Communities Officer be requested to provide a list of counselling services available in Hitchin together with the type of service provided by each organisation.

REASON FOR DECISION: To improve services provided by local organisations and groups which are accessed by the community.

71 GRANT APPLICATION - TRIANGLE COMMUNITY GARDEN

The Communities Officer reminded Members that the Triangle Community Garden was extending services by improving Ransoms Pavilion and purchasing IT equipment.

They worked closely with the NHDC Parks and Open Spaces team who supported the project and the application for grant funding.

RESOLVED: That grant funding of £2,850 be awarded to Triangle Community Garden from the 2017/18 Discretionary Budget towards the cost of purchasing IT equipment, a mobile phone and internal decoration and wi-fi for the Ransom Pavilion.

REASON FOR DECISION: To improve services provided by local organisations and groups which are accessed by the community.

72 INFORMATION NOTE - REGENERATION OF CHURCHGATE SHOPPING CENTRE

The Committee received an information note of the Deputy Executive regarding the regeneration of Churchgate Shopping Centre.

Members were concerned that the Hitchin Committee had not been consulted regarding this project and that they had only received an information note rather than proper consultation.

They also felt that the comments made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in regard to the management of larger projects regarding meaningful consultation should be reinforced.

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Members noted that the report mention refurbishment of the steps and wished to ensure that the Deputy Chief Executive was made aware of the historic nature of the steps leading from Churchgate Shopping Centre and that they should be preserved in any plans for upgrading the Centre.

Members wished to make clear that they looked forward to a good working relationship with Cabinet regarding this project.

In respect of the Market and the presentation made by Hitchin Markets Limited, Members wished to make clear that they looked favourably on the proposal for a rolling contract for Hitchin Markets Limited to continue to manage the market.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Deputy Chief Executive be requested to make note of the historic steps leading from Churchgate Shopping Centre to the car park, which should be preserved in any plans for upgrading the Centre;
- (2) That the information note regarding the regeneration of Churchgate Shopping Centre be noted and that the Hitchin Committee look forward to a good working relationship with Cabinet regarding the project;
- (3) That the Hitchin Committee looks favourably on the proposal for a rolling contract for Hitchin Markets Limited to continue managing the market;
- (4) That the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, in respect of the management of lager projects, regarding meaningful consultation be reinforced.

REASON FOR DECISION: To keep the Hitchin Committee apprised of the proposals regarding the regeneration of Churchgate Shopping Centre.

73 SECTION 106 AND UNILATERAL UNDERTAKINGS

The Development and Conservation Manager presented the report entitled Section 106 and Unilateral Undertakings and drew attention to the following;

On Monday the government published a draft new version of the National Planning Policy Framework which is now out for consultation.

This was a consultation document and it did not replace the current National Planning Policy Framework, which was published in 2012.

In general having briefly looked at the new draft it was very similar to the existing NPPF but with more emphasis on the importance of housing delivery.

On the issue of planning obligations and Section 106 there was very little to report.

In terms of planning policies the draft NPPF stated in paragraph 34 that:

“Plans, meaning Local Plans, should set out the contributions expected in association with particular sites and types of development. This should include setting out the levels and types of affordable housing provision required, along with other infrastructure (such as that needed for education, health, transport, green and digital infrastructure). Such policies should not make development unviable, and should be supported by evidence to demonstrate this. Plans should also set out any circumstances in which further viability assessment may be required in determining individual applications.”

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This was the only paragraph which referred to what should be put in the Local Plan regarding planning contributions.

Members should be aware that the current Supplementary Planning Document regarding Section 106 was 12 years old and this would be updated after the NHDC Local Plan had been through the examination.

In respect of development management decisions on individual planning applications the draft NPPF maintained the strict tests on the use of planning obligations set out in the existing NPPF and also set out in the report at Paragraph 8.1.1, which was that planning obligations should only be used when they are;

- a) necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms;
- b) directly related to the development; and
- c) fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development.

On the much publicised matter of stopping developers getting away with avoiding their obligations, particularly on affordable housing, in his view the NPPF was quite weak, particularly when you consider that Ministers have been stating that developers will now be forced to deliver the necessary infrastructure and obligations.

Paragraph 58 of the draft NPPF stated:

“Where proposals for development accord with all the relevant policies in an up-to-date development plan, no viability assessment should be required to accompany the application.

Where a viability assessment is needed, it should reflect the recommended approach in national planning guidance, including standardised inputs, and should be made publicly available.”

This meant that developers would no longer be able to label viability tests as confidential.

It then referred to the National Planning Practice Guidance which included details of standardised viability appraisals. The idea behind this was to standardise how viability appraisals are calculated in order to try and de-mystify the process and prevent sharp practices whereby developers pull the wool over the eyes of planning authorities and claim poverty to avoid meeting their obligations.

However even with a standardised approach, it would not avoid disagreements between what a planning authority wanted a developer to deliver and what they claimed the development can afford. With the continued emphasis on the need to deliver new homes, the Development and Conservation Manager could not see there being much shift of emphasis away from the interests of developers towards sometimes costly community infrastructure.

Disappointingly there was no reference to any consideration of removing the rule of five pooling limit which is referred to in Paragraph 8.2.1 of the report.

Also with the same tests set out in the existing NPPF there was no suggestion of a move back to the tariff approach, which NHDC adopted between 2006 and around 2014.

This meant that new financial contributions through Section 106 obligations could only be spent on projects identified in advance and specified within the legal agreement at the time that planning permission was granted.

If this Council wanted to revert back to a more general tariff approach, a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) would need to be adopted in the future.

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The Development and Conservation Manager expressed concern that the Council had not yet identified how they wanted the larger development areas, identified in the Local Plan, to function and how services would be funded or who would operate them. The current thinking was that the Council did not wish to adopt play areas and open spaces, due to the cost implications associated with maintaining them.

Members considered that identifying projects and infrastructure needs in the legal agreement for developments was probably a good idea, as the pooling limits imposed meant that current arrangements made it difficult to fund an entire project, although this would mean that there was no longer any money to fund projects that had not been identified at that stage.

They noted that up to 50 percent of development in North Herts had been of applications for less than 10 dwellings, which meant that no contributions had been received regarding these developments and queried whether local authorities could have a dual system of both Section 106 obligations and Community Infrastructure Levy and whether the policy of no contributions required for developments of less than 10 dwellings could be removed.

The Development and Conservation Manager advised that if NHDC adopted a Community Infrastructure Levy it could be levied on nearly all developments including those of less than 10 dwellings.

Section 106 and CIL could not both be used for the same development, however it was possible to mix and match and the most likely scenario would be that for strategic sites a Section 106 regime would be applied and for the small developments a CIL would be levied.

It was really important that consideration be given to how NHDC could get the best out of Section 106 agreements.

Members noted that there was a significant amount of Section 106 funding that had not been spent and queried why it had not been spent and whether there were any funds would have to be repaid if not spent.

The Development and Conservation Manager advised that most of the monies held in Section 106 contributions were for specific projects, many of which were affordable housing.

In respect of spending time limits, in most instances the time limit was 10 years

Members noted that there was a lot of money available for sustainable transport and monies available to spend on the public realm and queried whether close links should be made with the County Council regarding sustainable transport needs and what the funds identified for public realm could be spent on.

The Development and Conservation Manager advised that the monies could not be spent on the basics of a project, but had to bring additionality to an existing project. Section 106 monies could only be spent on infrastructure and could not be used for on-going running costs.

The Communities Officer advised that In respect of sustainable transport, a project was being worked on to consider installing bicycle racks in schools and community centres and around the Town Centre of Hitchin to encourage people to cycle.

Members queried why NHDC had not adopted a CIL regime as yet and asked for clarification that negotiating for Section 106 contributions was not as precise as the calculations used for CIL.

The Development and Conservation Manager advised that the CIL regulations had not remained stable and that NHDC had chosen not to adopt a regime that may change dramatically. Also, despite the fact that most of the monies collected would be for County

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Council obligations, the District Council had the obligation to administer the system, which had cost implications.

Section 106 agreements required an eligible project to be identified and costed in advance and if a project that related to the tests could not be identified no money at all could be collected.

Members noted that a lot of individual and small developments had occurred in Hitchin and asked that this information be provided to Hitchin Councillors.

Members asked whether Section 106 funding could be used to replace play equipment in the play areas that had been identified by the Council for the equipment to be removed.

The Development and Conservation Manager advised that Section 106 funding was intended to enhance infrastructure in order to offset demand by the residents of any new development and there were regulations that governed any spend.

Officers viewed these regulations as broadly as possible, but in the case of play areas, replacing equipment could not be viewed as increasing the capacity of that facility.

Members queried how this Committee could make its views known in respect of policy regarding the choices to make regarding issues such as the introduction of CIL.

The Development and Conservation Manager stated that the Local Plan only addressed these issues at a high level and the Council had to make decisions regarding the more detailed issues such as whether the Council should adopt play areas, when only 10 years' worth of maintenance costs was provided by the developer and whether private companies should be entrusted with the maintenance of green spaces.

Members felt that NHDC did not capitalise on asking for or spending Section 106 funding by identifying projects and this was not helped by the limit of five pooling rule and the fact that interest on these funds were taken into the general fund.

Members were concerned that Section 106 funding could be used for the Churchgate project without reference to the Hitchin Committee and asked that, if this was a consideration, this Committee be consulted before the decision was made.

Members asked to have input into the plan for the proposed Highover Farm development prior to the application being considered by the Planning Control Committee and queried whether doing so would affect the ability of Members of the Planning Control Committee to take part in any decision regarding the application.

The Development and Control Manage advised that he had previously provided advice regarding this issue and would arrange for this advice to be re-circulated to Members.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report entitled Section 106 and Unilateral Undertakings be noted:
- (2) That the Development and Conservation Manager be requested to continue to present a report regarding Section 106 and Unilateral Undertakings on an annual basis;
- (3) That, other than where a contribution has been negotiated for a specific purpose or project, Ward Members of the area where Section 106 or Unilateral Undertaking funding is generated and the Area Committee be consulted prior to funding being allocated away from that area or from a village location to a town;

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- (4) That, if it is proposed that Section 106 funding be allocated to the proposed regeneration of Churchgate Shopping Centre project, the Hitchin Committee be advised in advance of the decision to do so;
- (5) That the Committee and Member Services Officer be requested to re-circulate the response of the Development and Conservation Manager regarding the involvement of the Hitchin Committee in the proposed development at Highover Farm to all Members of the Committee.
- (6) That the Development and Conservation Manager be requested to provide information regarding the amount of housing provided in Hitchin to the Committee and Member Services Officer, for circulation by email to all Members of the Hitchin Committee.

REASON FOR DECISION:

- (1) To ensure that there is a robust system for negotiating and managing Section 106 and Unilateral Undertakings.
- (2) To ensure that this is kept under constant review and that the risk associated with this activity is managed in an appropriate manner.

74 HITCHIN TOWN CENTRE MANAGER

Mr Keith Hoskins, Hitchin Town Centre Manager, thanked the Vice-Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee. He introduced the new Hitchin BID Manager and gave a verbal presentation regarding the issues and activities in Hitchin Town Centre as follows:

Sun Street

Most of the people turning right at the end of Sun Street were those working at Hitchin Priory.

It may be a good idea to send a note to the company that they could circulate to their employees.

Bid Rangers

The BID rangers did a marvellous job and they were instrumental in enabling a serial purse snatcher to be apprehended.

Mr Hoskins wished to thank the BID Ranges for their efforts in clearing the snow from the pavements.

Funding of Hitchin BID and Initiative

The policy made by the NHDC that they could no longer fund projects bought forward by Hitchin BID or Hitchin Initiative was very frustrating and unclear.

Hitchin Initiative now had a Public Realm Group that would welcome funding for projects and seed funding could lead to other funding being secured.

The Dell

This project was still moving forward with negotiations currently taking place regarding covenant insurance.

The Council had decided that this was the best way forward as, although they had consent from one member of the Gainsford family to continue with the project, consent was required from all of the members of the family.

Covenant insurance would provide an indemnity should anybody object.

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They had met with the Executive Member for Leisure and the Parks and Countryside Development Manager at the Dell, both of whom were incredibly enthusiastic.

The Station

A meeting was held with County Councillors and the MP to look at access to the London bound platform and what could be done with the site formerly occupied by the Aggregates.

Work regarding this would continue.

Commercial Issues

There were currently some high-profile voids in the Town Centre; however this was no more than the natural churn after Christmas.

Many of these voids were at some stage of offer, although it should be noted that this process took some time.

BID Manager

Mr Hoskins introduced Mr Tom Hardy who was the newly appointed Hitchin BID Manager.

Mr Hardy informed Members that, prior to coming to Hitchin, he had been the Letchworth BID Manager for over two years.

He advised that Hitchin BID was heading into the renewal process when all of the business in the BID area would get an opportunity to vote on the new 5-year Business Plan which would begin April 2019. This vote would be held between 2 November 2018 and 4 December 2018.

They were currently considering the changing needs of the Town over the next 5 years including issues such as:

- How technology could be used to get people into the Town;
- How could the Night-time Marshalls be better used and directed to key areas of the Town;
- How events, that showcased the Town, could be improved;
- Considering the marketing strategy such as increasing website presence and the use of social media;
- Ways to promote Hitchin Town Centre as a tourist attraction and encourage people from outside of the area to visit Hitchin;
- Considering offering accredited training such as first aid and fire marshall training, window displays and marketing courses at a discount.

The businesses, which would be paying the BID levy, would then be asked what they would like to see in their Plan.

The BID had been very successful at “business as usual” including:

- BID Rangers, who worked really hard and were the eyes and ears of the BID and Town Centre;
- Night-time Marshalls who were becoming more and more important;
- Events such as the Christmas Light Switch On and the Hitchin Food Festival;
- Street cleaning, with chewing gum removal being arranged this year, thanks to County Councillor Locality Budget funding;
- Cardboard recycling, which was now used by over 200 businesses, saving them money.

They were currently tendering for the Town Centre floral displays and considering where these could be best placed as well as looking at the Christmas lights and the associated switch on event.

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There would be a meet and greet the new BID Manager event at Osinskys on 15 March 2018 from 12.00 to 15.00 and 1600 to 1900 and all Councillors were welcome to attend.

The Vice-Chairman thanked Mr Hoskins and Mr Hardy for their presentation.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Mr Keith Hoskins be thanked for the hard work on behalf of Hitchin that he has undertaken as Hitchin Town Centre Manager;
- (2) That Mr Tom Hardy be welcomed as the new Hitchin BID Manager.

REASON FOR DECISION: To keep the Hitchin Committee apprised of the work and activities being undertaken in Hitchin Town Centre.

75 WARD MATTERS AND OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS - MEMBERS' REPORTS

No Ward or Outside Organisation issues were discussed.

76 ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION AT FUTURE MEETINGS

The Vice - Chairman advised that it had been suggested that Hitchin Committee may like to consider having a permanent meeting venue for the coming Civic Year.

Following a brief discussion Members agreed that meetings should alternate, where possible, between Benslow Music School and Westmill Community Centre.

The Chairman advised that there was a comprehensive list of items for discussion at future meetings and suggested that this list be circulated to Members and that, in the new Civic Year, Members consider the priority that items be discussed also if Members wished to add any further subjects to the list to contact the Committee and Members Services Officer.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Committee and Member Services Officer be requested to circulate to all Members of the Hitchin Committee by email the list of topics to be discussed at future meetings of the Hitchin Committee;
- (2) That the Committee and Member Services Officer be requested to organise the meetings of the Hitchin Committee to be held at either Benslow Music School or Westmill Community Centre.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure that future meetings and agendas of the Hitchin Committee are organised efficiently.

The meeting closed at 9.48 pm

Chairman