

**North Herts Council
HITCHIN AREA FORUM**

**Meeting held at Hitchin Town Hall
On Tuesday 11 June 2024 at 7.30pm**

NOTES

Present: *Cllr Ian Albert (Chair) IA, Cllr Clare Billing (Vice Chair) CB, Cllr Keith Hoskins KH, Cllr David Winstanley DW, Cllr Elizabeth Dennis ED, VB, Nigel Mason NM, Cllr Daniel Wright-Mason DWM, Cllr Chris Lucas CL, Cllr James Denselow JD John Claydon- JC and Donna Wright DW*

In attendance: *Claire Morgan (Community and Partnerships Team Leader) CM, Chloe Grey (Enterprise Manager) Steve Crowley (Director of Enterprise), Ros Allwood (Museums Manager)*

Also present: *At the commencement of the meeting there were around 14 members of the public (MOP), including registered speakers.*

Meeting Started at **19:30**

Cllr Albert welcomed everyone in attendance and highlighted that it's an informal, inclusive meeting to share ideas.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr Val Bryant, Cllr Sam Collins and Aimee Flack

2. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Welcomed the public and presenters.

Members were reminded they are making recommendations and not decisions for grant applications.

3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN RELATION TO GRANT APPLICATION

Claire Morgan updated Members of community grant budgets.

The Community Grant budget available for 2024 - 25 is **£18,147**.

The grant funding requested at this meeting **£4,162**.

This will leave a remaining budget of **£13,985**.

3.1 Alan Doggett on behalf of **Rotary Club of Hitchin Tilehouse** presented an application for a community grant application.

AD spoke about last year's successful Youth Showcase in Market Place, he would like funding for this year's event.

Cllr KH – Declared – member of the Rotary - wished that Hitchin wide applications go to Southern Rural Community Forum too.

£550.00 requested.

PTO

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Proposed **IA**.
Seconded **CB**

Passed with one abstention but the majority voted in favour of recommending the application for £.550.

3.2 Tanya Dickson on behalf of **Hitchin Community Gardens (Triangle Community Garden)** presented the community grant application.

Requesting grant funding of **£1,612** for triangle tribe project.

Cllr CL – The project sounds beneficial 11 sessions per year - monthly apart from August.

How is it promoted to families? – through schools and targeting young people.

Have a concessionary rate for those on low incomes.

proposed. **KH**

seconded. **DW**

Unanimously voted in favour of recommending community grant funding of £1,612.

3.3 Clement Musonda presented on behalf of **Herts Vision Loss** a grant application for community grant funding of £2,000.

Cllr ED – Mentioned the importance of support for those new to sight loss.

Does the organisation reach out to the rural area, and should they apply to Southern Rural Community Forum?

Cllr KH – very worthwhile project – have you approached Herts County Council?

CMu responded - Yes, they have a contract with HCC for sensory needs assessments but want to set up a pilot session in Hitchin and Letchworth.

Majority voted in favour of recommending Herts Vision Loss application for £2,000.

IA proposed.

CL seconded.

Carried unanimously.

The Forum's recommendations will be presented in a Delegated Decision report to the Executive Member in consultation with the Service Director for Legal and Community for final decision.

4. TOWN TALK – ARTS & CULTURE THEME

4.1 James Willis and Glyn Doggett directors from Hitchin Creative CIC – born out of the North Herts Council's Arts and Culture Network coordinated by Danny Pearson (Community Partnerships Team). Launched in 2022 they run social group meetings. Over 500 people have attended various meetings over the last two years. Through promotion on social media, they have lots of members from the wider area. They are run by 6 volunteer directors. The coordinate some of the following activities:

- Hitchin Art trail hosting art in many of the businesses in the town.
- Hitchin Creative Day – launches Hitchin Festival 26 stalls in the market square. The Aim of Hitchin Creative is to provide opportunities. Hitchin Creative has taken over Hitchin Festival throughout July which is the 33rd year. They want to grow it more if they can secure funding. They are planning a winter festival in December. James is looking into a youth creative project.

They would like to do the performing arts event in the Dell again.

IA – would you like to see a Hitchin Arts Centre?

Yes, Hitchin is crying out for a central location with cinema, theatre, live music venue.

ED – The arts are important to economic development tourism strategy – Community / Art / Creativity.

Churchgate is a great opportunity for that. The Arts bring people into the area, encourages tourism and the use of local shops and restaurants.

4.2 Ian Britten-Hull from AMA Theatre Co to present.

IBH Explained what they do. They work in shopping centres, community centres, schools etc.

They work extensively all over the country and don't see as much happening in their local area.

They have performed London, but also in local communities across the country.

They turn community centres into a theatre space for performance events.

Cabaret style seating encourages ticket sales.

They did democracy events in local schools.

The wonderful thing about the arts that make people see things differently.

Want to train people in the artistic industries.

Amandeep Dhillon– Are you using arts for mental health – finds that she sells out events in other areas but not locally. Wondering why that is?

IBH responded that you must go out in person and bring people in.

4.3 Ros Allwood, (Cultural Services Manager) from North Herts Museum to present.

The Museum has now been open for 5 years – 50 exhibitions and 120+k visitors.

Upcoming exhibitions for this year– Toy story for summer and then the Snowman – stills from Raymond Briggs film.

August South Asian month will include an exhibition provided by – Khalsa Football Academy Bal Singh.

October Black History Month – North Herts Afro Caribbean culture from 80's house parties / sound systems.

The Hitchin Town Hall are putting on more events themselves.

5. CHURCHGATE UPDATE

Steve Crowley and **Chloe Gray** from (Enterprise team) North Herts Council for an overview of where we are at.

Alfie Roden from David Leonard Design to provide a short overview of the Investment Prospectus.

Steve Norris - Lambert Smith Hampton

Q&A

Ellie Clark – What form will the engagement take? LSH will set out engagement strategy with Stakeholders. Stalls in square, popup in empty shop, schools - broad church of opinion. Work out what is best for Hitchin rather than work out what's best for the developer.

Alan Doggett – asked why Churchgate is the worst it's ever been.

SC – working with our agents Browne & Lee to upkeep the current units.

KH – disputed that it's the worst it's ever been. There are two new businesses on church yard and only one large empty unit. It's not as bad as it has been.

Robin Dartington; Looking at the prospectus I get no feeling for what the vision is.

Ellie Clark – It's critical that coordination and making things happen should all go through a Hitchin Councillor. Cllr Keith Hoskins should be part of the project board.

NM – I understand the point of the consultation, but Hitchin has consultation fatigue. Can we make sure that something is fed back to the public about what we've done with their views on previous consultation?

CG – The consultation will follow the 'you said we, did format', people said the Market was key and we've taken that on board (for instance)

Amandeep Dhillon– can you look at inclusivity, listen to everyone – ethnicities and backgrounds.

Anne Senechal – St Marys Church – asked LSH what other similar projects have you worked on?

SN - Have worked on other market towns – for example we have worked in Yarmouth and Newmarket – the markets need to be flexible spaces and the old anchor stores don't exist anymore which used to bring people into town centres.

CG said that the last consultation showed that people liked the idea of a market but don't use the market. The desire appears to be a community arts and culture hub within the town centre.

6. INFORMATION NOTE: GRANTS & COMMUNITY UPDATE

Claire Morgan, Community and Partnerships Team Leader, gave a Community Update. Most can be read in the report, additional notes of interest to the community:
No questions were raised.

7. WARD MATTERS & OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

No matters were raised.

8. FUTURE AREA FORUMS

Nigel Mason – Road Safety
HCC Council can we get Highways officers to present?

March – Police report

Hitchin Town Council

Everyone Active – outreach activities.

ED – first or second meeting of next Civic year – to look at Hitchin station access and improving transport across the town.

Meeting closed at 21:33.