

**North Herts Council
HITCHIN COMMUNITY FORUM**

**Meeting held at Hitchin Town Hall
On Tuesday 10 December 2024 at 7.30pm**

NOTES

Present: Councillors Ian Albert (Chair) (IA), Clare Billing (Vice-Chair) (CB), Val Bryant (VB), Keith Hoskins MBE (KH), Nigel Mason (NM), Dave Winstanley (DWi), Daniel Wright-Mason (DWM) and Donna Wright (DWr)

In attendance:
Aimee Flack (Community and Partnerships Officer) (AF) and Cllr Daniel Allen (Leader of the Council and Interim Executive Member for Planning and Transport) (DA)

Also present:
At the commencement of the meeting there were around 15 members of the public (MOP), including registered speakers.

Meeting Started at **19:31**

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

We have received apologies from Cllr Jon Clayden.

2. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Cllr Albert welcomed everyone in attendance.

Highlighted that the Forum is an informal, inclusive meeting to share ideas.

Members are reminded to make declarations of interest before an item they may wish to abstain from voting if they have an interest, but they are merely making recommendations and not decisions.

3. HITCHIN BID TOWN CENTRE UPDATE

Tom Hardy, BID Manager presented

- New Hitchin cookbook – sold 230 so far
- H-Town pounds scheme going well. Can be spent at over 80 businesses in the town.
- H-Town business awards were held at the Christmas lights switch on. There were 400 votes on social media.
- Running windows competition.

- H-CAM – had 140,000 views so far. 2,000 watched the Christmas light switch on.
- Made tweaks to make sure H-CAM is GDPR compliant.
- Launched a new charity – Action Hitchin. Flyer has gone to every household in Hitchin explaining it. A way for residents to raise money for the town. [Action Hitchin | Hitchin | 1A Churchyard, Hitchin, UK](#)
- Christmas lights – not all working in one go yet, which wasn't helped by the recent storm. Should be fixed tonight.
- Pay on exit parking – highlighted that there is a desperate need for it.

DA

- in response to the pay on exit parking – installation will start in January. There will be choice of paying by cash and card.
- Town centre strategy going to council in March.

IA

- Riverside walk – administration is really keen on this and outlined the current steps that are being undertaken which includes settling legal issues, informing residents, assessing lighting, hedges and updating footpath.
- Biggin Lane car park – currently is only open to Market Traders on Fridays and Saturdays. From 1st April, as Market Traders only need exclusive use up until around 9.00am, there will be a change of regulations put in place so public can use it from around 9am on Friday and Saturday.
- Highlighted that obviously don't want people to use cars if possible, but recognize that some people further afield need parking.

NM – gave feedback that the Action Hitchin charity leaflet could be clearer about who they are and transparency. A great cause, just a bit confusing initially in how it's been explained in the leaflet.

DA – asked if the charity will be raising funds to go towards a Town Council.

TH – advised it isn't.

Danny Pearson, Operations Coordinator gave an events update

- Recent events such as Food Fest and Hermitage Road Day were a success. Planning for next year.
- Christmas switch light switch on had 4,000 people.
- Tractor parade is coming – businesses have been notified.
- Quite a few trails on at the moment – postbox toppers, Frozen Hermitage trail, Hitchin Creative trail.

IA – thanked the team for all the amazing work they are doing.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN RELATION TO GRANT APPLICATIONS

The Community Partnerships Officer informed those present that there is **£8,178** available in the 2024/25 grant budget. If all grants are recommended and subsequently approved, there will be **£2,552** remaining in the budget for the

remainder of the financial year.

Received presentations in support of grant applications by the following:

Alex Daar presented the **Carers in Hertfordshire** application

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- how they will sustain the hub beyond the 12 months
- how they will reach unregistered carers
- how they share information about benefits for unpaid carers

KH advised to liaise with current carers café in Hitchin

Venues - Cllrs will liaise with AF to pass on suggestions for venues to Carers in Hertfordshire

- DW proposed.
- CB seconded.

Unanimous vote in favour of recommending Carers in Herts £1,393 towards setting up and running a support hub in Hitchin for unpaid carers.

Bee Smyth presented **The British Schools Museum** application

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- the exhibition space
- equipment they will be using
- that the exhibition items are being loaned to help support the Museum

KH – declared is a member of Friends of British Schools Museum so will refrain from voting.

- DWM proposed.
- DWi seconded.

KH abstained from voting. The remaining 7 Members voted in favour of recommending The British Schools Museum £1,133 towards updating display room for exhibitions.

Adam Nethersole presented the **Hitchin Town Youth Football Club** application

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- what repropotion of members are girls and that the club have a good relationship with the local girls football club
- safeguarding and anomalies between templates which are easy to fix

- discussed Rands Trust Fund
- NM proposed.
- DWM seconded.

KH abstained from voting as already funding through locality budget. The remaining 7 Members voted in favour of recommending Hitchin Town Youth Football Club £1,300 towards two sets of goal posts.

Natalie Forecast presented the Caudwell Youth presentation

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- How the costs have been worked out and how many young people it will help.
- DWi proposed.
- CB seconded.

Unanimous vote in favour of recommending Caudwell Youth £1,800 towards the salary of a Youth Support Coordinator.

5. PRESENTATION – EVERYONE ACTIVE COMMUNITIES TEAM

Danny Kingston, Activity and Wellbeing Manager from the **Everyone Active Communities Team** presented about their work in the community.

- Held a consultation.
- Current community outreach in Hitchin – Senior Circuit Class at Whitwell Fellowship Hall on Thursdays, 1.30-2.30pm. Also at Weston Community Centre on Tuesdays 11am-12pm. First 12 weeks fully funded, then £4-5 per session.
- In 2025 want to launch more sessions in Hitchin. Exploring venues such as Walsworth, Westmill and St Micheal's Mount.
- Men's Club – currently at North Herts Leisure Centre - workshop discussing low mood, anxiety, stress, coping strategies. Plans to run a 4 week course in Hitchin in the New Year.
- Menopause café – monthly meetings at Hitchin Swimming and Fitness Centre, Fridays 1-3pm. Future dates 10th January, 7th February, 7th March.
- Exercise referral – exercise on prescription for people with health conditions [Everyone Active - Online Referral Form](#)
- Offer various walking sports.
- Community Café – every Thursday, 12.30 – 3pm, at North Herts Leisure Centre, a free space for senior members of the community to socialize before or after their physical activity.

- Pickleball – is really on the rise in popularity. Combines elements of badminton, tennis and table tennis. Beginners Pickleball at North Herts Leisure Centre, Tuesdays, 9.30-11.30am, £4 per session.
- Outlined junior activities at North Herts and Royston Leisure centres.
- Free memberships for people living with Parkinson's.
- Also offer free memberships for cared for and care experienced children.
- Explained Sporting Champions scheme – helping athletes on the rise reach their potential with free access to facilities and mentoring. Application opens in February.
- Club support – looking to work with clubs to help advise on things such as how to run viably, funding opportunities, marketing support.
- Any links to be made with local groups, do contact the team.
- Throughout summer – carried out a everyone loves lido project. Whenever it wasn't sunny – worked with community partners to offer free use. For example, did this with Carers in Hertfordshire. Keen to continue this next summer.

Opened up to questions:

DA – asked about whether they are looking into wheelchair activity.

DK – yes, working on this currently. Working with partners to explore this. Looking to launch something in Royston as they have the hall capacity. Currently unable to do this in Letchworth due to cost of storage and hall capacity.

DWr – asked about what evening sessions there are for older people working full time?

DK – yes there are some in the evening and on the agenda to look into more.

DK – Gym refurb in Hitchin underway – opening 23rd December.

6. TOWN TALK – OPEN DISCUSSION

Opened to the floor to questions and discussion relevant to Hitchin.

MOP1 – asked about servicing the road to the industrial area. Issues due to recycling centres and lorries.

IA – discussions about the recycling centres are ongoing and has been raised at County Council. IA is meeting with one of the metal recycling plants. MP Alistair Strathern has it on their agenda to look into. Ultimately it's going to be difficult to build a new road and IA will be bringing up what are the potential possibilities for relocation.

DA – confirmed building a new road isn't possible.

MOP2 and MOP3 asked about planning permissions and usage of metal recycling companies and their sites. Asked what is in public domain, requested that IA asks can they give a breakdown of where material is coming from and where it's going to, as waste should be processed closely to where it was generated.

MOP1 – requested that they are asked about their traffic movements and compare to previous years.

At this point of the meeting, 21:15, items originally advertised on the agenda were moved around due to speakers needing to leave and running short on time. New order reflected below.

7. PARKING TARIFF CONSULTATION

Cllr Daniel Allen, Leader of the Council and interim Executive Member for Planning and Transport, presented on the proposed parking tariff increase for 25/26.

- Full details can be found on [Off street parking tariffs | North Herts Council](#)
- In brief summary, the recommendation is for it to go up 10p an hour.
- This is a consultation.
- Happy to share full breakdown.
- There will be a flat rate after 3pm, for Hitchin £1.50 in the long stay car parks and £1.70 in the short stay car parks.

8. HITCHIN MOSQUE UPDATE

Haziq Patel and Redwan Ahmed, from the **HITCHIN MOSQUE** presented about their work and search for new premises.

- Hitchin has a well-integrated and established Muslim population present for more than 60+ years.
- Hitchin Mosque was established in January 1984 in a central location of Hitchin Town, a terrace residential property purchased by the community. Hitchin Mosque is the only Mosque in the North Hertfordshire area.
- The Mosque is managed by a committee panel with trustees and elected members.
- The Muslim population has continued to grow over the decades, with the census in 2011 reporting that those identifying as Muslim make up (1.1%) (2021 – 1.5%) of the North Hertfordshire population.
- The community has subsequently outgrown the current building and is in desperate need of a larger premises. The current mosque is not ideal for the current needs and is not conducive to the long-term requirements.
- Been looking for a new site for 3 years.
- The current needs would suggest they need at least 3000 sq ft to 5000 sq ft building.
- A place of worship that has dedicated parking or suitable off-road parking, ideally accessible to a central location but perhaps in a mixed-use area to minimise localised congestion at peak mosque visitation times/days.
- Bury Mead Road area would be an ideal location given the centrality of this area to a large populous of the Muslim community.

- Need assistance in navigating red tape. They have the finances.
- Looking for support from the forum to support them in that piece of land or any other land.

Opened to discussion

IA gave update on Bury Mead Road site

- Currently used for museum storage, the Council will need to make a decision next year if the site is the best option to redevelop the museum storage or if it's better to relocate the museum store to another purpose built building. Which would then free up the Bury Mead Road site.
- Decision will be made no later than next May.
- There aren't other assets in Hitchin that the Council have to offer.
- Community could help in looking for different sites.

8. CHURCHGATE

Cllr Ian Albert gave a short update:

- Consultation ran between September-November
- Comprised of key stakeholder workshops (Hitchin Market, Forum, Tenants, Schools), an in-person Hub at unit 16/17 Market Place and an online and hard copy survey
- In-person hub was attended by over 1,000 people
- Survey was completed by 1,505 people
- As a result of the data collected, we have identified five themes that will help us shape the vision of the project. Please see below:

Revitalisation of Hitchin Market - the market is considered one of Hitchin's greatest strengths and people are keen to see it brought forward as flexible, vibrant, and community-centred.

Sustainable regeneration – the incorporation of green space and eco-friendly initiatives are considered of high importance.

Improvement of accessibility – people want to see better access to the Town Centre through parking, public transport, and pedestrian routes.

Affordable housing – the most important aspect of any housing brought forward in the plans will be affordable homes.

Community and leisure spaces – it is important to people that community spaces are multi-functional, flexible spaces that provide for all demographics.

- The findings of the consultation will be communicated to the wider public throughout January and February 2025.

9. COMMUNITY MATTERS

Cllr Albert gave an update on the recent flooding and fires in Hitchin.

- Bringing together key agencies is important. In order to make sure that residents know who to contact. Agencies work more effectively together.
- The environment agency and Council are clearing some of the embankments this week. Important to get maintenance right.
- Need to keep up the pressure, residents to keep up that pressure so that a difference can be made. Perhaps discuss more at next meeting.

10. AOB

MOP4 – explained an event they are organizing to raise funds for Garden House Hospice.

They were offered support and advice from those present.

MEETING CLOSED 21:45