

**North Herts Council
HITCHIN COMMUNITY FORUM**

**Meeting held at Hitchin Town Hall
On Tuesday 4 March 2025 at 7.30pm**

NOTES

Present: Councillors Ian Albert (Chair) (IA), Clare Billing (Vice-Chair) (CB), Val Bryant (VB), Jon Clayden (JC), Elizabeth Dennis (ED), Keith Hoskins MBE (KH), Nigel Mason (NM), Chris Lucas (CL), Dave Winstanley (DWi), and Donna Wright (DWr)

In attendance:
Aimee Flack (Community and Partnerships Officer) (AF)

Also present:
At the commencement of the meeting there were around 10 members of the public (MOP), including registered speakers.

Meeting Started at **19:31**

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

We have received apologies from Cllr Daniel Wright-Mason.

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.

Community Governance Review

Council have resolved to launch the second public consultation of draft proposals for the Community Governance Review. This will launch on Friday 14 March and the deadline for responses is 9 May.

For each parish there is the proposal to change the electoral cycle so that all scheduled parish elections are held on the same year as the district council elections.

For some parishes there are proposals to change boundaries and / or the number

of parish councillors.

There is also the suggestion to establish new town councils for Hitchin, Letchworth and Baldock.

Note that these are only draft proposals, and the final recommendations will be considered at a future Council meeting, taking the results of the public consultation into account.

The second public consultation will again encourage online responses. However, should anyone not have access or confident responding online they can visit the council offices and use the computers in the main reception with assistance by members of staff or they can make contact either on the phone, letter, in person, email, and a paper version can be supplied. These paper versions will also be made available at the monthly Councillor Surgeries in the four market towns.

Whether you agree or disagree with the draft proposals, please do respond to the consultation and with any alternative proposal you may have.

There's a dedicated webpage on the Council's website titled 'Community Governance Review' which will include a link to the survey once live.

3. HITCHIN BID TOWN CENTRE UPDATE

Tom Hardy, BID Manager presented

- Would like to look more into signage for the new parking check in and check out with the Council.
- There are concerns around the proposed Sunday and evening parking charges.
- Trying to promote independent hospitality. Really challenging time for businesses. Focusing on footfall in the town.
- Highlighted two new events – plans for a soap box derby down Windmill Hill. End of July looking into having a wrestling ring in The Market Place.
- Highlighted the new Action Hitchin Charity, this link has further information - [Action Hitchin | Hitchin | 1A Churchyard, Hitchin, UK.](#)
- Churchgate – gave feedback from businesses and market. Have been in touch with the new managing agent and looking to propose a new strategy for pop up lets for vacant units on a short-term basis.
- BID team had a walkabout with Councillors before Christmas. A lot of the things the BID want to achieve are more Herts County Council related than District and some national. Keen to get a group of key stakeholders together to look at solutions.

Topics covered in the Q&A:

- Concerns raised about proposed Sunday and evening parking charges. IA encourages residents to feedback when the consultation takes place.

- Brief discussion around how it would be useful to survey how much people are spending in town on an average trip and to see how resident usage has changed. Things have changed for town centres, there are different needs where shopping is secondary to hospitality
- MOP – thanked the BID for everything they have done for the centre. However highlighted that the town isn't inclusive. Don't feel welcome and there are barriers. Need to be respectful for those who are less able. This led to a discussion concluding that more needs to be done to make the town more accessible.

4. PRESENTATION – POLICE UPDATE

Verbal presentation from Police Sergeant Taranvir Gill from the North Herts Safer Neighbourhood Team.

Topics covered in the Q&A:

- Discussion around Cllr Bryant's observation of increased parking on yellow lines. Police can give warnings but if on the road it's the Council's responsibility, if on the pavement it's for the police to deal with.
- Increase of shoplifting – there is no increase in assaults relating to the shoplifting.
- Burglaries – more people committing these offenses, motivation is often because of financial strain
- Outcome rate of arrest has increased in line with the rise of crime. 13% increase of offenders going to court.
- Police have a close relationship with the BID. Even though resources for the Police have been a real challenge across Hertfordshire as a whole, they have reallocated Officers to the town centre, working around the clock with constant shift changes. Response times in Hitchin are best in North Herts, it's a testament to the Town Centre Rangers as well.
- Cllr Wright asked how the community can help – engaging with the police is important. Police looking to have better engagement with younger people by going into schools and to understand concerns.

PS Gill advised they are happy to book in ward walks with Councillors and to get in touch.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN RELATION TO GRANT APPLICATIONS

Aimee Flack, the Community and Partnership Officer, updated Members of community grant budgets.

Received a presentation in support of a grant application by the following:

Laura Hyde presented the **Resolve** application for £1,500.

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- People who live outside the area are welcome.
- Will be looking into whether there is a need to have more evening meetings.
- People who live in Welwyn attend the meetings they hold there. They are keen to get their North Herts site more known.

IA Proposed
DWi Seconded

VB abstained from voting as they are Executive Member for Community and Partnerships.

The remaining 9 Members voted in favour of recommending Resolve £1,500 towards the costs of a Key Worker who runs the Group Therapy and Key Work Sessions.

6. TOWN TALK - TRANSPORT UPDATE FROM HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Jeff Clayton, the Strategy & Programme Manager for Highways Implementation at Hertfordshire County Council gave an update covering the below topics:

- Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) for Queen Street bus stops & layout
- Town Centre proposal to simplify materials palette and improve accessibility
- Recap on 20mph zoning in 2024-25
- Report on volumes and safe travel routes at junctions.

Topics covered in the Q&A were:

- Request from **NM** for increased signage of 20mph around Nightingale Road
- Discussion throughout around need for 20mph in other areas of Hitchin, such as Westmill, Willow Lane, Charlton Road
- Reporting things such as potholes should be done through this link - [Report a street light, pothole or other problem | Hertfordshire County Council](#). A member of public highlighted that they reported an issue twice and hasn't been resolved
- Update on the accessibility of the eastern access to the railway station is that more funding needs to be sourced and need sign off from Network Rail
- A member of public expressed disappointment about an ongoing unresolved issue they have raised. JC will pick this up after the meeting
- Discussion around the impact of potential Luton Airport expansion on five junction study

7. INFORMATION NOTE ON NEW BIN DELIVERIES

Information was published with the agenda, explaining that there will be new bin deliveries in May, ready for the new collection service in August. A waste department representative will be presenting at the June community forum to go through the changes in more detail.

Link - [Information note on new bin deliveries.pdf](#)

8. INFORMATION NOTE ON ECO FLEX SCHEME

Information was published with the agenda about the Energy Company Obligation Flexible Eligibility scheme.

Link - [Information note on Energy Company Obligation Scheme ECO Flex.pdf](#)

9. COMMUNITY UPDATE

The Community and Partnerships Officer highlighted:

- that the Council have launched a survey to hear resident's thoughts on the Council's future Sustainability Strategy. Deadline to complete the survey is 31 March, further information can be found through this link [Help shape North Herts' sustainable future | North Herts Council](#)
- shared that the North Herts Heroes videos of the winners are now online [North Herts Heroes 2025 - YouTube](#)

CB highlighted the success of the Chair's Civic Event that celebrated the North Herts Heroes, and that over £800 was raised for the charity, Sands. [Heroes praised & money raised at Chair's charity event | North Herts Council](#)

10. WARD MATTERS & OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

Cllr Ian Albert gave a brief update on Churchgate, Riverside Walk and Charnwood House. Full updates are below:

Churchgate Regeneration Project Update

The results of the consultation that took place in September-November last year have been launched to the wider public. This consists of a summary report of the feedback collated – which can be found on the dedicated Churchgate page on the NH Council website, or in the Bio of our Instagram and Facebook pages.

The report takes a deeper dive into the five key recommendations coming out of the consultation (these were presented at the last Forum) and gives an overview of the answers provided by the public (all 1,505 of them!).

There is a video on social media of the Leader of the Council, Cllr Daniel Allen, talking about the importance of the project and next steps. This is part of a video series being released on our social media platforms to help communicate the outcomes of the consultation – so look out for them! We are also launching our online Hub very soon, that provides a one-stop shop for the project so far.

There was also a piece in the Comet last week regarding the publishing of results, including an interview with Cllr Allen.

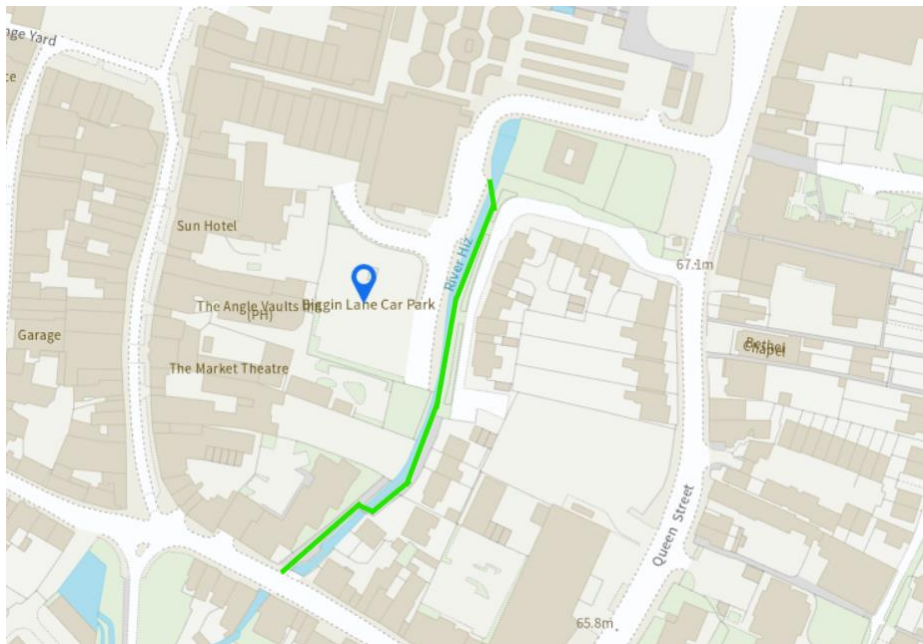
Churchgate Shopping Centre Management

From 1 February, the day-to-day management has transferred from Brown and Lee to Praxis Property Management. We are busy with onboarding and their

initial work is promising. We are investigating if we can secure UKSPF funding for some appropriate improvements.

Riverside Walk

This remains within the Responsible Growth priority of the Council Plan with the aim of delivering the walkway between Bridge Street and Biggin Lane to increase footfall in this part of the town centre. Following the results of a topographical survey of the proposed route, an outline proposal is being put together by an external firm of consultant engineers. Preliminary indications are that the optimum route of the Riverside Walk will follow the route approximately shown in green below. Unfortunately, due to illness of the engineer there has been a delay but they are now progressing.



The route will involve the construction of a new footbridge over the Hiz near to the Biggin Lane car park. The path will need to be for the use of pedestrians only (and not mounted cyclists) due to the width of the existing walkway adjacent to Jill Gray Place. Once the draft plans are available they can be shared more widely in due course.

The residents of Jill Grey Place have been informed that a specific proposal is being formulated and are being kept abreast of plans, and the residents of Bridge Court will similarly be contacted once further details of the proposal are available.

In the meantime, it has been noted that the paving of the walkway at Jill Grey Place is in poor condition and could constitute a trip hazard. Here fencing is to be installed to prevent access to the damaged paving.

There are a number of stages to delivery of this project including outline and

detailed design, consultation with key stakeholders, planning and conservation area consents, Highway and Environment Agency consents, tender for the works and delivery. The estimated completion of this work is due to be 31 March 2026.

Charnwood House

Unfortunately, future plans for the property have not progressed as fast as we would all like, primarily due to other immediate priorities including the new Churchgate contract, work bringing forward development sites and proposed acquisition of a property for the museum storage for example.

The current position is Charnwood House is not formally on the market at present. In March 2022 the Council announced its ambition to revitalise Charnwood House for the benefit of Hitchin and the wider district. Subsequent to this, external agents were tasked with engaging potential operators for Charnwood House, envisioning it as a lively community space.

Despite marketing, no suitable proposals emerged, leading to the exploration of alternative pathways to restore the building's functionality. Subsequently there has been interest from a few groups, including Hitchin BID through a charitable arm, and we have had initial discussions with them and others but no decisions taken as yet.

The Estates team are in the process of reporting back to Executive Councillors with an options paper and next steps with the plan to secure a suitable letting and use for the property, which remains the aspiration of the Council.

To safeguard Charnwood House from further decay, essential roof and other works have been undertaken to maintain its structural integrity, in addition to clearance within the property and main electrical works so the property is safe for viewings. We have received an updated survey and budget costings for bringing the property back into use, which is under review.

The Council has a web page for the property remains at [Charnwood House | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/charnwood-house) which is periodically updated and includes frequently asked questions.

11. TOPICS FOR FUTURE FORUMS

IA – Suggested a waste theme in June and perhaps Green Space in September.

CL – River Hiz usage, ways to utilize and amplify it.

DWr – Highover development – would like to invite developers to come to the June meeting.

KH – highlighted that we have run over time for this and previous meeting. Are there other ways of sharing updates on the projects through the meetings. Suggested only one main presentation per meeting.

MEETING CLOSED – 21.47