

**North Herts Council
HITCHIN COMMUNITY FORUM**

**Meeting held at Hitchin Town Hall
On Tuesday 9 December 2025 at 7.00pm**

NOTES

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

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

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

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies received.

2. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Cllr Albert welcomed everyone in attendance.

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

3. TOWN TALK - DRAFT TOWN CENTRES STRATEGY

Cllr Donna Wright (DWr), Executive Member for Place presented:

- Explained that the draft Town Centres Strategy consultation is open until 30th January.
- Gave an overview of the strategy. Full background details available in the information report which was published with the agenda [here](#).
- Highlighted there is a section on Hitchin under part 3.
- Encouraged everyone to share views, is there anything missing.
- Explained ways of accessing the consultation [Town centres strategy | North Herts Council](#)
- A hard copy is also available to view at the Council's Customer Service Centre at the main Council Offices on Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City.
- Explained navigating the document online.

Topics covered in the Q&A:

- Rural access - it was raised that walking and cycling routes into Hitchin from surrounding rural areas are currently very limited. DWr advised there is a commitment to addressing the issue, and awareness of its importance has been acknowledged.
- How is the Council going to engage with the whole of Hitchin – DWr outlined various ways they will approach this and happy to take suggestions. IA highlighted that they also want to engage with local groups like the Hitchin Forum. The Hitchin BID will help spread the word about the consultation with businesses.
- 2004 Hitchin Town Centre Strategy - KH expressed initial disappointment that the section on Hitchin is a lot shorter than the 2004 strategy. Noted the mixed progress since then. Churchgate remains unimproved, pavements need better maintenance, and evening bus services require improvement.
- Timeframe for getting it through and achieving it – aim is for the final document to be approved by North Herts Council in March. Then delivery depends on partners, funding, and feasibility. Will be actively monitoring delivery plan.
- Impact of Local Government Reorganisation – MOP raised concerns about achievability and risk of the strategy being lost after LGR. It was confirmed it's a statutory obligation as it will form part of the local plan. Whilst it's too early to say what the LGR impact will be, the intention is that it will continue to be taken forward and good to get it going now. IA highlighted that a Town Council would be something that could help with this.
- Where will funding be found for the extensive works proposed – IA recognises the need to leverage funding into Hertfordshire as part of the devolution settlement. Building new roads is a difficult issue.
- Links to Lavendar Farm – discussion around whether there's a way of creating a safe route which doesn't involve use of a car.
- Improvement of disability access needed and especially more disabled parking spaces.

4. HITCHIN BID UPDATE

Danny Pearson, Town Centre Manager from Hitchin BID, gave a presentation about the BID's work:

- Christmas Light Switch-On was a huge success. Parade included event contributors from the year. Next year's light switch-on set for 14th November.
- Halloween Trail had 400 sheets handed in.
- Remembrance Event - discussions underway to potentially host it in the square next year, as well as the memorial.
- Hitchin Town Business Awards received hundreds of public votes, winners listed below:
 - Employee of the Year – Numberworks
 - Best Customer Service – Cloud nine baby
 - Town Centre Champion(s) – The Hitchin Soapbox Team
 - Best Overall Business Award – Bridgetown Munroe
- DP was interviewed on Herts radio.
- Vacancy rate - units are getting snapped up.
- Highlighted upcoming Christmas events and winter trails - [What's On - Visit Hitchin](#)

Q&A:

- Discussion around what's happening with some of the empty units.
- Discussion about trends in the high street and that there are a few phone shops.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN RELATION TO GRANT APPLICATIONS

AF updated Members of community grant budgets. The current Community Grant budget available is **£16,553**. The total amount of funding requested for this meeting is **£3,000**.

If the applications outlined in Appendices 2 and 3 are recommended and approved, there would be **£13,553** available for Community Grants for the remainder of the 2025-2026 financial year.

Received presentations in support of grant applications by the following:

Representative from **Impactful Lives** presented an application for £1,500 towards a series of gatherings for LGBTQ+ residents in Hitchin and North Herts to help reduce isolation.

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- Engagement – they have 36 people currently engaged and have 800 people on their database. People tend to find out about it through word of mouth, personal recommendations and having a presence at local pride events.
- Venue – stressed the importance of having a safe space to have the gatherings in.
- Qualifications – explained those running the sessions are fully qualified.
- Activities – they provide mindful activities which help encourage a space for people to open up. Providing a service which is more tailored for the LGBTQ+ community.
- Support – DWM asked how the Council can further support their work. It was explained that there is a lot of hate crime creating fear within the LGBTQ+ community. St Albans Council have shown their support by a recent motion that aims to promote transgender rights.

Hitchin BID expressed support in promoting their work.

IA – Proposed
CB – Seconded

Unanimous vote in favour of recommending £1,500 towards a series of gatherings for LGBTQ+ residents in Hitchin and North Herts to help reduce isolation.

KH declared an interest for the next grant, therefore didn't join in the discussion or vote.

Representatives from **St Mary's Church** presented an application for **£1,500** towards cost of fitting out new accessible toilets in the church building.

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- Planning permission – they confirmed they have received the planning permission required.
- Ongoing fundraising for this project – they anticipate fundraising on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day will help as it's a busy time for the church. They are optimistic

about nearing the end. Explained how it was important to ensure the works created an accessible space.

IA - Proposed
JC - Seconded

10 councillors voted in favour of recommending £1,500 towards towards cost of fitting out new accessible toilets in the church building.

6. INFORMATION ON SECTION 106

IA highlighted that information about Section 106 relating to Hitchin was published with the agenda. IA requested this information to make sure Councillors and the public are aware of the full picture.

NM – thanked Officers for putting this report together and important to be transparent.

There was a discussion around the importance of public engagement on it. DWr advised she will take this feedback back to the planning team.

7. INFORMATION NOTE ON PROPOSED PARKING TARIFF INCREASES

IA highlighted that an information note was published with the agenda to inform the Community Forum of the proposed parking tariff increases for 2026/27 initial option.

DWr – keen to hear your views. 9th January is the deadline.

8. COMMUNITY UPDATE

AF explained there will be a press release to help promote the Hitchin Community Grant to groups as there's still £13,553 remaining.

Also highlighted that North Herts Heroes the awards is open to nominations until 4th January [North Herts Heroes 2026: Nominations Now Open | North Herts Council](#).

Q&A

- Discussion around the grants process with the action to re-circulate the grants crib sheet to Councillors.

9. WARD MATTERS & OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

IA provided a summary of the updates published with the agenda on:

- Churchgate
- Riverside Walk
- Charnwood House

Q&A

- Discussion around timings of Charnwood.
- Riverside – aim is to complete in spring / summer next year.

10. TOPICS FOR FUTURE FORUMS

IA explained that the Police are booked in for March for their usual annual update and that there will be a written update provided prior to the meeting.

NM – noted that the update is usually focused on data and suggested that more contextual information would be helpful and engaging.

Also still have the below topics logged for when the timing is right:

Bus Operators – invite Arriva, Stagecoach and Herts Lynx

Hitchin Train Station Access

Green Space Strategy

Churchgate

MEETING CLOSED AT 20:53