

**North Herts Council
HITCHIN COMMUNITY FORUM**

**Meeting held at Hitchin Town Hall
On Tuesday 10 March 2026 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), Tracy Westgate (Community and Partnerships Officer) (TW), Frank Harrison (Environmental Health Manager) FH

Also present:
At the commencement of the meeting there were around 22 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 - POLICE UPDATE

Police Sergeant Taranvir Gill (TG) and Inspector James Lant (JL) from the North Herts Safer Neighbourhood Team presented. Police Constable Stacie Peacock (SP) was also present

- TG presented the Crime Data for Hitchin, which was published with the [agenda](#)
- Shoplifting - JL highlighted that a lot of work has been done to respond to shoplifting more effectively.

Topics covered in the Q&A:

- [Home Page - Herts Connected](#) – TG encouraged everyone to sign up to Herts Connected, a free interactive messaging service from Hertfordshire Constabulary.

- Weapon possessions and why is it up across North Herts – JL advised that it could be an outcome of a rise in stop and searches.
- Public trust in reporting – TG advised they are always looking to improve ways of encouraging reporting. Crime reporting hasn't gone down and still have a constant flow of crimes reported. SP explained how taking shoplifters to court is proving to be a good deterrent.

TG encouraged Councillors to contact the team to arrange any ward walkabouts.

4. HITCHIN BID UPDATE

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

- Summarised recent meetings with North Herts Council (NHC)
- Highlighted the Priory Music Series - [Hitchin Priory](#)
- Their newsletter will now be seasonal and went through what's in it
- They are offering a free social media course for businesses
- Working closely with Hitchin Festival
- Have launched Hitchin's bid to be Town of Culture 2028
- Looking to refresh the floral display in the town

Topics covered in the Q&A:

- IA expressed appreciation to Hitchin BID for the important things they do for the town
- There was a discussion around changes in the Herts County Council (HCC) policy that could have an impact on the BID's budget. CL will be investigating further.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH UPDATES

Frank Harrison, Environmental Health Manager at North Herts Council, gave an update on Air Quality in Hitchin and the Renters' Rights Act

- Gave a brief introduction on the role of Environmental Health.
- Explained that two Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) have been revoked in Hitchin as both areas were well below government threshold requirements.
- They continue to monitor air quality with 42 monitoring sites in the North Herts District.
- A Health Impact Assessment (HIA) has been carried out by Hertfordshire County Council of Hitchin's industrial estate and Grove Road area
- Encouraged all to give views on Hertfordshire County Council's Draft Air Quality Strategy, the opportunity to comment closes on 22 March - [Air Quality Strategy 2026 | Hertfordshire County Council](#)

Topics covered in the Q&A on Air Quality

- What happens to the monitors not being used anymore – FH advised that the power supply has been disconnected and high value equipment removed. IA advised that he is looking into whether a monitoring station could be recycled and

put in Grove Road. For confirmation, FH has advised it's not possible to use the AQMA units from Stevenage Road, Hitchin at the Grove Road site as AQMA units no longer operative.

- How are the commercial waste sites being monitored – FH advised there are nitrogen dioxide monitoring stations (as part of the 42 on-going sites around district). The results are in line and nothing exceptional. The Environment Agency is also monitoring but results are fed back to Hertfordshire County Council (HCC). IA explained that County Councillors and the MP will shortly receive the results of the HIA. Following this there will be another public meeting to discuss the report and next steps.
- Is it possible to have dynamic/mobile monitoring, which is a way of monitoring air pollution using equipment that can moved to different locations, rather than being fixed in one area – FH advised that it will be referenced in the new NHC Air Quality Strategy, which is currently being drafted. The draft strategy will present options for NHC Councillors to consider in due course although decisions will come with the associated implications.

There were no further questions and FH moved onto the update on the Renters' Rights Act

- Tenants and Landlords need to be aware of the Renters' Rights Act which is new legislation which becomes enforceable from 1 May.
- It was explained how central Government will provide guidance which will be supplemented by NHC and made public as soon as practicable.
- Look at the NHC website on the Tenants' Charter for further information, which will be updated as new information becomes available - [Tenants Charter: advice for tenants and landlords | North Herts Council](#)
- Gave background as to why Awaab's Law has been put in place - Awaab Ishak, a 2 year old, tragically died in 2020 from a lung condition caused by mould in his home - [Awaab's Law: Guidance for tenants in social housing - GOV.UK](#)

Topics covered in the Q&A on Renters' Rights Act

- How to ensure tenants know about it – FH shared a Tenants' Charter leaflet produced by NHC. Will advertise on the NHC's social media and in the Outlook magazine. Highlighted that private sector Tenants are hardest to reach because of a fear of being evicted. However a part of the act is 'abolish section 21 evictions' which will provide more security for tenants - [Guide to the Renters' Rights Act - GOV.UK](#)
- Also, to help ensure tenants (and owner-occupiers) do not live in poor conditions, home-visiting professionals are being offered training to identify key housing risks – see [Healthier homes for healthier lives](#) training
- The Landlords' Database – FH explained that all Landlords will need to register and rollout of it likely 2027.

6. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN RELATION TO GRANT APPLICATIONS

AF updated Members of community grant budgets. The current Community Grant budget available is **£13,553**. The total amount of funding requested for this meeting is **£11,676**.

If the applications outlined in Appendices 2 - 12 are recommended and approved, there

would be **£1,877** available to carry forward into the 2026/27 budget, subject to approval from Cabinet.

Received presentations in support of grant applications by the following:

Representative from **12th Hitchin Scouts** presented an application for £1,248 towards rental of storage facilities

There were no questions.

Proposer IA
Secunder JC

Unanimous vote in favour of recommending £1,248 to 12th Hitchin Scouts

Representative from **6th Hitchin Scouts** presented an application for £900 towards a one-night residential camp

There were no questions.

Proposer IA
Secunder CL

Unanimous vote in favour of recommending £900 to 6th Hitchin Scouts

For the next three grants, Cllr Albert declared conflicts of interest and passed the Charing role onto Vice Chair, Cllr Billing. Cllr Albert didn't join in the discussion or vote on these grants.

Representative from **Hitchin District Scout Council** presented an application for £1,500 towards replacing Pico sailing dinghies

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- Choice of dinghies – they were researched and there was an overwhelming vote in favour of this choice
- Where they are stored – in Arlesey and routinely sail there and the Essex coast

Proposer CB
Secunder KH

10 Councillors voted in favour of recommending £1,500 to Hitchin District Scout Council

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

Representative from **North Herts Ramblers** presented an application for £1,500 towards installing a display in front of Hitchin Library showing details of the Hitchin Outer Orbital Path

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- Ongoing maintenance – it was explained that they plan to use recycled plastic which they have used for benches and have found they are keeping well. Being outside the Library is a visible location.

Proposer CB
Secunder NM

9 Councillors voted in favour of recommending £1,500 to North Herts Ramblers

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

Representative from **North Hertfordshire Centre for Voluntary Service Limited** presented an application for £1,500 towards a Hitchin Volunteer Fair

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- Corporate volunteering – they are focussing on this as well
- Why the cost for the fair in Hitchin is more than in other areas in North Herts – it was explained that the other projects are smaller in scale
- Sustainability of the banners – it was explained that they have been designed so that they can be used again
- BID hire cost – it was explained that this is a charitable rate and the BID's charge goes towards the cost of gazebo maintenance and Hitchin Ranger time
- Why they haven't applied to the Letchworth Community Forum – the cost in Letchworth is being funded by the Letchworth Heritage Foundation

Proposer CB
Secunder CL

9 Councillors voted in favour of recommending £1,500 to North Hertfordshire Centre for Voluntary Service

Cllr Albert took over Charing again as he no longer had any conflicts of interest

Representative from **Letchworth and Hitchin Unit 182 of the Sea Cadet Corps** presented an application for £450 towards nature related activities for Junior Sea Cadets. Also, for £368 towards a pilot camping trip with Junior Sea Cadets and their families

Before they presented, AF explained the background to why the applicants have two projects to present, as outlined in appendices 6 and 7. AF also advised that Members of the Letchworth Community Forum recommended 70% of both applications at the Letchworth Community Forum on 4 March 2026.

There were no questions for these applications

Appendix 6 Application
Proposer IA
Secunder CL

Unanimous vote in favour of recommending £450 to Letchworth and Hitchin Unit 182 of the Sea Cadet Corps

Appendix 7 Application

Proposer IA

Secunder VB

Unanimous vote in favour of recommending £368 to Letchworth and Hitchin Unit 182 of the Sea Cadet Corps

Representative from **Baldock Junior Badminton Club** presented an application for £730 towards delivering a new weekly badminton and social sessions for older adults in Hitchin

Before they presented, AF advised the outcome of the applicant's applications to the Letchworth Community Forum and Southern Rural Community Forum. At Letchworth, it was recommended in principle, subject to them securing hall hire. At the Southern Rural Community Forum, it was recommended with no conditions.

There were no questions.

Proposer IA

Secunder JC

Unanimous vote in favour of recommending £730 to Baldock Junior Badminton Club

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

Representatives from **Friends of Whitehill and Highbury Schools** presented an application for £980 towards musical instruments

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- Whether they had approached Hitchin Educational Foundation for funding – there was a discussion that explained this fund is for secondary education

Proposer IA

Secunder KH

10 Councillors voted in favour of recommending £980 to Friends of Whitehill and Highbury Schools

Representative from **Headway Hertfordshire Limited** presented an application for £1,500 towards their Hitchin support group that meets at The Hitchin Garden Centre

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- What are the causes of the brain injuries – explained it may result from events such as strokes, tumor removal and traumatic impacts to the head

Proposer IA

Secunder CL

Unanimous vote in favour of recommending £1,500 to Headway Hertfordshire Ltd

Representative from **Tilehouse Counselling** presented an application for £1,000 towards workshops and group therapy

Before the applicant presented, AF explained to Members to refer to the updated Appendix 11 which was published as a supplement. The originally published Appendix 11 had a typo, and the total project cost is £2,340.

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- Connections with local schools and colleges – it was explained that they are looking to improve their connections, and a lot of people find out about them through word of mouth. CL advised he would be happy to help connect them with North Herts College
- How costs are worked out and how long it will last – they explained in detail what they take into account when looking at charges and how they plan to run the sessions

Proposer IA
Seconder CL

Unanimous vote in favour of recommending £1,000 to Tilehouse Counselling

7. COMMUNITY UPDATE

AF highlighted that Hertfordshire County Council is consulting on proposed changes to Hertfordshire's post-16 home-school and college transport policy.

The consultation will run from 18 February to 12 April 2026. Further details are available on their website, where you can also share your views by completing a short online survey. <http://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/ptbconsultation>

Also highlighted current funding from Settle/Paradigm - [Settle Community Benefit Fund | Settle Connect](#)

8. WARD MATTERS & OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

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

- Churchgate
- Riverside Walk
- Charnwood House
- Oughtonhead Weir Project

There were no questions

9. TOPICS FOR FUTURE FORUMS

IA explained that the below topics logged for when the timing is right:

Bus Operators
Hitchin Train Station Access
Green Space Strategy
Churchgate

DWr – explained that responses to the Draft Town Centre Strategy are currently being analysed.

Meeting Closed at 9.43pm