

**North Herts Council
HITCHIN COMMUNITY FORUM**

**Meeting held at Hitchin Town Hall
On Tuesday 2 JUNE 2026 at 7.00pm**

NOTES

Present: Councillors Ian Albert (Chair) (IA), Val Bryant (VB), Jon Clayden (JC), 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), Rachael Rooney (RR) (Interim Strategic Planning Manager), Debbie Coates (DC) (Strategic Planning Team Leader)

Also present:
There were around 12 members of the public (MOP), including registered speakers.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies received from Councillor Clare Billing.

2. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Cllr Albert welcomed everyone in attendance.

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

Members were reminded to make declarations of interest before an item they may wish to abstain from voting if they have an interest.

3. ANNUAL HITCHIN COMMUNITY FORUM MINUTES

Members voted whether they wish to approve the minutes of the 2024, 2025 and 2026 Annual Hitchin Community Forums.

**IA Proposed
KH Seconded**

Following a vote, Members unanimously voted in favour of approving the minutes of the meetings from 2024/25/26.

4. TOWN TALK - NEW LOCAL PLAN SCOPING CONSULTATION

Before the presentation began IA highlighted that Herts County Council (HCC) will be starting a 20mph consultation exercise in a couple weeks, exact time it opens is to be confirmed.

Charnwood House Cllr Ian Albert announced:

I can confirm that North Herts Council has chosen BTG Eddisons, Luton office to lead on the expressions of interest exercise for Charnwood. It is expected that this exercise will begin before the end of June.

Any organisations who have already registered their interest will be advised when we go live. Any other interested parties prior to marketing are directed to email estates@north-herts.gov.uk as the Council has a list already and they can be added to this for sending onto the agent prior to the marketing starting.

Rachael Rooney (RR) Interim Strategic Planning Manager and Debbie Coates (DC) Strategic Planning Team Leader presented

RR gave an outline of what the scoping consultation sets out to do and background as to why it's important.

The PowerPoint presentation has been published alongside these notes.
For full details please see the Scoping Document - [Community consultation strategy](#)
The scoping consultation is open until 28th June and welcome any feedback.

DWr – As Executive Member for Place thanked the work of the team and encouraged everyone to engage.

Topics covered in the Q&A:

- Town Centre Strategy (TCS) – RR explained the planning elements will be taken forward as part of the Local Plan. The strategy will cover more than the Local Plan issues. The TCS is planned to be published in September but to be confirmed and then Delivery Plans will follow after.
- Next consultation stage – RR explained that in the Autumn there will be a document which will set out options to feedback on. In Autumn 2027 there will be a draft plan to feedback on.
- Highways and current safety issues with things like parked cars – RR explained that when we assess sites which may be potential allocations in the new plan, HCC will be undertaking modelling work. Acknowledged that the right policies and priorities need to be put in place as aware of these issues.
- How the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) changes impact on the Local Plan – RR advised that the NPPF will have planning policies that are set out nationally and Local Plans shouldn't repeat them. This is to try and simplify the system. For example, issues like heritage might not be mentioned in the Local Plan as they are national policies but they will still be part of the decision making process when officers are assessing planning applications. By moving some policies nationally, means that Local Plans will deal with more local issues, like masterplanning, area action plans, etc. In addition to the NPPF, there is also another level of planning being introduced called the Spatial Development Strategy

(SDS). This will deal with more strategic issues such as infrastructure, strategic transport and data centres. The SDS for this area has been agreed to cover the Hertfordshire area. Likely that HCC will take the lead of this in the first instance.

5. HITCHIN BID UPDATE

Danny Pearson (DP), Town Centre Manager from Hitchin BID, gave a presentation about the BID's work.

- Celebrated small businesses week.
- Bunting has gone up.
- Some hanging baskets have been adopted by schools and a green charity.
- Highlighted that there has been recent filming in the town.
- On social media they will be doing a video of places to watch the world cup in town.
- Social media manager delivered a free course for businesses.
- The network meeting continues for businesses.
- The North Herts Council Bee Corridor is coming to Hitchin.
- Pub watch meeting – regular meetings for licensed bars. DP brought in a bag of fake IDs collected in one month from one venue.
- Hitchin Festival – booklets will be circulated soon. Talked through upcoming events.

Topics covered in the Q&A:

Impact of recent filming in the town - discussed the mixed feedback from businesses on the impact of the filming. Some did well whilst others were affected negatively.

6. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN RELATION TO GRANT APPLICATIONS

AF updated Members of community grant budgets. The Community Grant budget available is **£21,227**. The total amount of funding requested for this meeting is **£7,501**.

If the applications outlined in Appendices 2 - 6 are recommended and approved, there would be **£13,726** available for Community Grants for the remainder of the 2026/27 financial year.

JC and KH declared interests in relation to the Hitchin British Schools Trust application, therefore won't take part in discussion or vote for this grant.

Received presentations in support of grant applications by the following:

Representatives from **Partners of Wilshere-Dacre Junior Academy** presented an application for £1,500 towards replacing playground equipment.

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- Why the school is unable to pay for it – it was explained that the funding isn't there. Also, there are a lot of underprivileged families and therefore any funds are focused on ensuring they can still take part in activities such as school trips. ED raised the issue that value of play is vital and there is a wider piece of work for the government to look into this.

KH Proposed
DWi Seconded

Members voted unanimously in favour of recommending £1,500 to Partners of Wilshere-Dacre Junior Academy

IA highlighted to contact him with regards to Locality Funding.

Representative from **Herts Disability Sports Foundation** presented an application for £1,500 towards their Bikes Without Barriers programme at Oughton Primary School.

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- Whether the children are taught about technical things like keeping tyres inflated. It was explained that this is covered by Bikeability initiative, as part of level one.

NM Proposed
ED Seconded

Members voted unanimously in favour of recommending £1,500 to Herts Disability Sports Foundation

Representative from **SOW CIC (Shout or Whisper)** presented an application for £1,500 towards three 'Spotlight' events for local creatives to perform their spoken word work.

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- How they will publicise to new and different audiences – they plan to engage with different organisations and don't want it to be tokenistic and open to all voices.
- How they will focus it in Hitchin as it's a grant for the Hitchin area – with regards to performers they are mindful of having as many local people as they can. They also advertise it locally in cafes and have the support of Hitchin BID advertising it.
- The link between workshops and events – the workshops are to give people confidence to commit word to paper, that they can then perform.

ED Proposed
JC Seconded

Members voted unanimously in favour of recommending £1,500 to SOW CIC

Representative from the **British Schools Museum (which is operated by Hitchin British Schools Trust)** presented an application for £1,501 towards their first Summer School

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- Age group they are targeting – which is 10–12-year-olds
- Is it on a first come first serve basis to book – Offering it at different price ranges. As it's a pilot, going to see if it's viable and offer more in the future.
- Will they be contacting schools to put forward students – they are happy to consider this.

DWr Proposed
DWM Seconded

7 Members voted in favour of recommending £1,501 to Hitchin British Schools Trust

As per earlier declarations of interests by JC and KH, they didn't take part in the discussion or voting of the British Schools Museum application.

Representative from **Resolve** presented an application for £1,500 towards the costs of a Key Worker who runs the Group Therapy and Key Work Sessions.

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- If funding from other forums is being requested – confirmed they are applying to Southern Rural this round as well.
- How much has been raised so far towards the overall costs – They have already secured £95,000. They are diversifying their income streams to reach the target.

KH highlighted that as Resolve are requesting funding regularly from all the forums, perhaps a memorandum of understanding would be a better approach. VB and IA advised they are happy to consider this and will take it away as an action point to look into what's possible.

VB Proposed
JC Seconded

Members voted unanimously in favour of recommending £1,500 to Resolve.

7. COMMUNITY UPDATE

AF gave an update on a new Community Centre Network that has been set up by the Community/Partnerships Team.

8. WARD MATTERS & OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

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

- Oughtonhead Weir Project
 - NM noted that they would like local councillors to be invited and involved with site visits.
- Riverside Walk
 - IA will look into finding out more about a timeline.
 - DP requested they come to present on this at the next Community Forum.
- Churchgate
 - VB highlighted that a lot is happening behind the scenes to progress this project.
- Charnwood House

Members were invited to share any further ward updates:

JC – It is the 50th anniversary of the signing of the twinning agreement between Hitchin and Nuits-Saint-Georges.

ED – The Walsworth Festival in May was a successful event. If anyone has feedback on the event, now is the ideal time to feedback. Also, always on the lookout for volunteers.

9. TOPICS FOR FUTURE FORUMS

The Riverside Walk, as mentioned earlier.

MEETING CLOSED AT 21.07