North Herts Council
HITCHIN COMMUNITY FORUM

Meeting held at Hitchin Town Hall
On Tuesday 15 September 2026 at 7.00pm

NOTES

Present: Councillors Ian Albert (Chair) (IA), Clare Billing (Vice Chair) CB, Val Bryant (VB), Jon Clayden (JC), Keith Hoskins MBE (KH), Nigel Mason (NM), Donna Wright (DW) and Daniel Wright-Mason (DWM)

In attendance:
Aimee Flack (Community and Partnerships Officer) (AF), Rachael Rooney (RR) (Interim Strategic Planning Manager), Tom Ayres (TA) (Greenspace Manager), Kieran Cockayne (KC) (Graduate Management Trainee), Philip Dogget (PD) (Principal Estates Surveyor)

Also present:
There were around 10 members of the public (MOP), including registered speakers.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies received from Cllr Dave Winstanley and Cllr Elizabeth Dennis.

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.

TOWN TALK

3. PRESENTATION – GREEN SPACE CONSULTATION

Tom Ayres and Kieran Cockayne from North Herts Council's Greenspace Team presented on the Council's green space consultation

Residents are invited to share their views on North Herts Council's green spaces as part of a new public consultation to gather feedback on how residents use local green spaces, what they value most, and where improvements could be made.

This is a link to the consultation which ends on 30 September - Have your say on North Herts Council's green spaces | North Herts Council

Topics covered in the Q&A

- What is the feedback covering so far – it has been broad. Hitchin has had the most feedback. They would like to have more younger people complete the survey.
- Impact of climate change – it was suggested that shade should be thought about more with temperatures rising in the summer. More sheltered walkways and parks, particularly in the Swinburne area.
- Waste collection – it was raised that having one contractor to collect waste from bins, particularly St Mary's Churchyard, would make it more straight forward to ensure they are emptied regularly.
- Positive feedback was given on the survey being clear and easy to follow.
- Planting more trees – the Tree Officer is always keen to plant more trees but there's always lots of challenges to consider, such as what's under the ground.
- Function of spaces – it was raised that it's important to always reflect on the changing use of places. Important to be resilient to extreme weather changes. It was discussed how valuable the spaces were during Covid as a safe space to meet.
- Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) – it was raised by MOP that they hope LGR will be a way of continuing and expanding work, rather than starting from new.
- Biodiversity – this is ranking high as a priority in the feedback and appetite to focus on it more. The highest ranking issue so far is however bins.
- Green spaces for teenage girls – the Greenspace Team are keen to explore how spaces can be designed to feel more inclusive for girls.

Oughtonhead Weir – Project Update

TA was invited to give an update on this project, below contains full details.

- The project started with a feasibility study to identify the best way of managing the failed weir and the change in river level between the upstream and downstream sections.

- The original proposal was to remove the weir and regrade a longer section of the river upstream, alongside habitat improvements

- Following early contractor input, the design was revised to retain the good-quality habitat that has already developed upstream. The current proposal is to replace the failed weir with five rock pre-barrages, creating a short-stepped cascade. Notches within the structures will assist fish passage.

- This approach is smaller in scale, retains the existing upstream habitat and provides a more proportionate solution. The existing mill stream will also be retained, with an electric pump included to periodically top it up and maintain water movement.

- The revised design has been reviewed through the Environment Agency process, including additional information requested by the National Fish Pass Panel. The additional survey work has now been completed.

- Separately, the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust has developed designs for wider habitat improvements along the River Ouse. Affinity Water has recently expressed an interest in supporting this wider work, linked to its plans to recommence abstraction from the aquifer.

- We are therefore now looking at whether the weir project and the wider River Ouse project could be delivered together. This could provide greater environmental benefits and potentially reduce costs through efficiencies in procurement, project management and delivery.

- Discussions are currently taking place with Hertfordshire County Council, Affinity Water and the Environment Agency to establish what those potential savings would be.

- A meeting is scheduled shortly to review the position and, importantly, understand whether the potential savings justify waiting to combine the projects.

- If the benefits of combining the schemes are not sufficient, the intention will be to proceed with the weir project as a standalone scheme, using the existing North Hertfordshire District Council budget alongside available and forthcoming Section 106 contributions.

- The immediate next step is therefore to establish the costs and potential efficiencies of the combined approach, after which a decision can be made on the most appropriate way to proceed.

Topics covered in the Q&A:

- Completion – they hope to finish works as soon as possible. NM logged concerns on how long it's taken.
- Metal fencing – this should be coming down soon.
- Sharing more regular updates – IA will look into whether updates can be shared on the Council's website.

4. PRESENTATION – RIVERSIDE WALK UPDATE

Philip Doggett (PD), North Herts Council's Principal Estates Surveyor presented on the planned Riverside Walk

PD talked through the vision, how it's evolving and next steps

A written update is published here - Updates from Enterprise and Estate Teams.pdf

Topics covered in the Q&A

- Consents – PD explained the various consents that are required by Highways Agency, North Herts Council Planning and the Environment Agency.
- How long construction works would take – PD advised that details haven't been worked out yet but hopes disruption would be limited.

5. HITCHIN BID UPDATE

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

- Chosen a Christmas tree from a sustainable tree farm.
- Talked through past events, including the Duck Race, Comic Con, Wrestling and the Beach. Highlighted how a lot of events were good for younger people.
- North Herts Pride held their Pride event for the 5th year and the biggest event they've had.
- Food fest was a success with the Great Hitchin Bakeoff a highlight. The event was sponsored by local food businesses.
- The BID are providing free workshops for businesses, the next one is on Social Media.
- DP highlighted concerns about Queen Street works and the impact it will have on businesses.
- There will be more Police presence in the town centre starting in October.
- The next meeting for local businesses will be in October.

IA thanked DP for all of the BID's work.

6. NEW LOCAL PLAN UPDATE

Rachael Rooney, Interim Strategic Planning Manager, gave a brief update on the next New Local Plan consultation, which will be on the Content and Evidence document. It opens from 13 October to 24 November.

The PowerPoint presentation with further details has been published alongside these notes.

Topics covered in the Q&A:

- Developments – the BID Manager requested for a list of developments that have been approved.
- 5 year supply – RR talked through why there is a shortfall of housing that needs to be made up for.

7. PRESENTATION - LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

In light of the recent news around Local Government Reorganisation being paused, instead of the intended opportunity for questions, a brief statement was given by IA.

On 7 September Central Government announced that the current Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) programme is being paused whilst a review takes place. The review has been announced to ensure the process is robust and aligns with the new government's plans to shift power, funding, and accountability from Whitehall and Westminster to local elected mayors and combined authorities.

For Hertfordshire this means that the decision to create four new unitary councils for 1

April 2028 has been paused while this review is carried out. This means there will not be elections to the shadow authorities. The May 2027 local elections planned before LGR was announced will go ahead in the other nine Hertfordshire districts and boroughs. Parish Council elections will continue as planned for North Herts in May 2027 with the next North Herts District Council elections held in May 2028.

This Government states that it remains committed to devolution and remains of the view that unitary councils are a better foundation for mayors and strategic authorities. We await details on the devolution plans and how the Government plans to ensure effective and sustainable local government in the future. We also await further details on the scope and timetable for the review and will update staff, councillors, stakeholders and the public when there is further substantive news. Please accept our apologies if you have come this evening to specifically hear more about LGR.

8. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN RELATION TO GRANT APPLICATIONS

AF updated Members of community grant budgets. The Community Grant budget available is **£13,726.** The total amount of funding requested for this meeting is **£3,747**.

If the applications outlined in Appendices 2 - 4 are recommended and approved, there would be **£9,979** available for Community Grants for the remainder of the 2026/27 financial year.

AF also clarified that for the application from Growing Resilience in Teens it advises that £1,891 will come from fundraising. It has since been clarified by the applicant that within this amount, £350 is from Cllr Albert's Herts County Council Locality budget and £300 from Cllr Prendergast's Locality budget. This doesn't change how much they are applying for and was explained for transparency.

AF also confirmed that the provision of funding from HCC Councillors, who are also NHC Councillors, does not constitute predetermination and they are therefore able to discuss and vote on grants coming to the forum. As long as they don't have any other pecuniary interest in the organisation or project.

JC declared an interest in relation to the Growing Resilience in Teens application, therefore won't take part in discussion or vote for this grant.

Received presentations in support of grant applications by the following:

Representative from **Growing Resilience in Teens** presented an application for £1,500 towards training for coaches.

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- Referrals – it was explained that there is an open referral pathway where anyone can refer a young person, including the young person.

VB Proposed
DW Seconded

7 Members voted in favour of recommending £1,500 to Growing Resilience in Teens

Representative from **Caring Herts CIC** presented an application for £1,500 towards the running of weekly Wellbeing Hub Sessions.

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- How attendees get to the sessions, are there any issues – the applicant explained that it is challenging and they overcome some of the challenge by support from North Herts CVS and Community Transport to drive attendees to sessions.

JC Proposed
KH Seconded

Members voted unanimously in favour of recommending £1,500 to Caring Herts CIC.

Representative from **Everyone Matters** presented an application for £747 towards informal concerts in care settings

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- How they decide which care settings they perform at and does it include private care settings – it was explained that the aim is to perform for anyone who would benefit and includes private settings. The applicant explained a bit more about how it works at private settings. Any contributions they receive from care settings can go towards future performances elsewhere.
- Have they looked into intergenerational projects? - it was explained that they do this in London but not currently in Hitchin.

NM Proposed
DWM Seconded

Members voted unanimously in favour of recommending £747 to Everyone Matters.

9. COMMUNITY UPDATE

AF gave an update on the work of the Community Partnerships team. Also, what's going on in the Hitchin community, this included:

- Upcoming network groups that are being held in Hitchin by the team
- New Badminton sessions for older people have been set up by Baldock Junior Badminton Club at Westmill Community Centre following funding from the Hitchin Community Forum in March.
- Cultural Connections event at Westmill Community Centre for young people.

Posters for these events can be found at the end of the notes.

10. WARD MATTERS & OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

IA provided a summary of the updates published with the agenda on Churchgate and Charnwood House.

Members were invited to share any further ward updates:

- In March the Hitchin Community Forum awarded funding to Hitchin District Scout

Council for funding towards new Pico sailing dinghies. NM attended the launch of the new dinghies and gave positive feedback about the event.

11. TOPICS FOR FUTURE FORUMS

The suggestions below were logged:

- IA - Hitchin Health Impact Assessment, when the new action plan is available.
- DWM - flooding, a joined-up presentation on what's being done.
- VB where roadworks are happening and mapping. IA advised that he and Cllr Chris Lucas as County Councillors could look into this.

IA advised that the below topics are still logged for when the timing is right:

- Bus Operators and franchising
- Hitchin Train Station Access
- Churchgate

IA opened up to any final questions:

- MOP raised concerns about lorries and for clarity on what the rules are. IA advised that he is looking into this.

MEETING CLOSED – 21:15

Live Longer Better with

Over 50's Badminton!

Social badminton to help keep you moving

Westmill Community Centre

John Barker Place, Hitchin SG5 2PG.

Weekly, starting 1st October 2026.

14.00-15.30pm (inc. refreshments).

Contact Bob on 07952 932662.

Live Longer Better. in Hertfordshire

Herts Sport & Physical Activity Partnership

no strings badminton

BADMINTON ENGLAND

Hertfordshire Badminton Association

North Herts Council

LET US KNOW YOU ARE COMING

HITCHIN

CULTURAL CONNECTIONS

An inspiring community event supporting young people to build self-esteem, develop confidence, and take an active interest in their future

THURSDAY
24 SEPTEMBER

AT WESTMILL
COMMUNITY CENTRE
10AM - 2PM

FREE ENTRY

Supported by a range of local businesses and organisations, offering engaging activities and opportunities to connect throughout the day.

For young people in Year 9 - Year 12 who are:

- **missing from education**
- **on part-time timetables**
- **not engaging in education**
- **at risk of suspension or exclusion**

Hertfordshire Virtual School

HERTFORDSHIRE CONSTABULARY

FUTURE YOUTH INSPIRED