

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

HITCHIN COMMITTEE

**MEETING HELD IN THE WESTMILL COMMUNITY CENTRE,
JOHN BARKER PLACE. HITCHIN
ON TUESDAY, 11TH SEPTEMBER, 2018 AT 7.30 PM**

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors Ian Albert (Chairman), Clare Billing (Vice-Chairman), Judi Billing, Val Bryant, Paul Clark, Sam Collins, Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, Simon Harwood, Bernard Lovewell and Martin Stears-Handscomb*

In Attendance: *Claire Morgan (Senior Communities Officer), Milan Johnston (Communities Assistant) and Hilary Dineen (Acting Committee and Member Services Manager)*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting approximately 25 members of the public.*

28 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – Start of Item – 1 minute 1 second

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Nicola Harris, Mike Hughson and Richard Thake.

29 MINUTES - 5 JUNE 2018

Audio recording – Start of Item – 1 minute 18 seconds

The Acting Committee and Member Services Manager had offered her apologies that the Minutes regarding the meeting held on 5 June 2018 had not yet been published.

The minutes would be published as soon as possible and would be available at the next meeting of the Committee.

30 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – Start of Item – 1 minute 43 seconds

There was no other business notified.

31 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – Start of Item – 1 minute 49 seconds

- (1) The Chairman thanked those who had attended Town Talk and welcomed those who were speaking at Public Participation;
- (2) The Chairman reminded Members that, in accordance with Council policy, this meeting was being audio recorded, members of the public may use their own devices to record the meeting or take photographs, but ensure that the meeting was not disrupted;

- (3) The Chairman drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question;
- (4) The Chairman advised that he would be changing the order of the agenda. The Hitchin BID Manager would have to leave early and therefore this item would be heard first.

32 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - HITCHIN INITIATIVE

Audio recording – Start of Item – 8 minutes 40 seconds

Mr Keith Hoskins and Morag Norgan, Hitchin Initiative, and Mr David Edwards, Place-Make, thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a PowerPoint presentation regarding the Churchgate Shopping Centre and the surrounding area.

Mrs Norgan introduced the presentation and advised this was not about the history of Churchgate, but about what came next.

In light of the possibility of new development, the Hitchin Society had reconvened, under the Hitchin Action Group banner, to look at fresh ideas.

David Edwards was an urban designer, living in Hitchin, who would present a very exciting proposition that would begin the discussion about how Hitchin could evolve so that it remained a vibrant community which was able to respond to the changing demands of business and businesses.

Mr Edwards explained that the idea was to stop looking at Churchgate as a building, but rather look at how it fitted into the urban context.

When talking about Churchgate it was difficult see beyond Churchgate the building. He had looked at the context and the flow of the town centre and movement through it.

Due to the development of the town centre over many years, there were very predominant east/west routes and very few north/south routes and there was no natural market place that was a central part of the town.

Churchgate dominated one side of the market square and was very different to the other side of the square where the building were more evenly distributed.

The discussion should be about the type of place any redevelopment would create and this proposition considered the routes through the town and the part that Churchgate could play in opening up the town centre and repair the urban fabric of the town centre that had been affected over the last 200 years.

There was the potential to incorporate the market, link heritage aspects, open up views to St Mary's and forge north/south links through the town.

Members were asked to consider how these ideas could be taken forward.

In response to questions from Members, the presenters advised:

- They were talking about ways to find the momentum to sway the Local Authority to consider other concepts and ideas, rather than about specifics;

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- The intention of the presentation was to highlight how the town centre had developed in the 16th century causing the issues being discussed today and to try to prevent a similar discussion taking place following the redevelopment of Churchgate;
- The ideal would be to develop a master plan or concept framework that could be developed over time.

Members were supportive of the ideas in the presentation but explained that the Council could not control what happened to buildings that they did not own and had some concerns that the larger the project became and the more people involved, the less likely it was to be successful.

It was suggested that Hitchin Initiative develop a detailed plan and present it to the Authority as a way to start the discussion.

The Committee expressed a wish to work closely with the local groups to look at the scheme in more detail.

The Deputy Chief Executive had been given a copy of the presentation and had been asked to undertake wider consultation.

The Chairman thanked Mr Hoskins and his colleagues for their presentation.

33 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE MS SOCIETY

Audio Recording – Start of Item - 39 minutes 4 seconds

Ms Susan Gibbins, Support Volunteer, North Hertfordshire MS Society, thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee regarding their grant application as follows:

- Funding was requested to purchase an innovative bike that would be of enormous benefit to the North Herts MS group;
- The bike had been recommended by their physiotherapist, who had over 30 years experience and had been working with this group for more than 20 years;
- It would provide bilateral and symmetrical exercise, enabling mobility, strengthening and co-ordination for upper and lower limbs;
- The stability of the design offered more support for a greater range of users, including for those with more limited movement;
- There were a number of motivational aspects to further enhance the benefits for users, encouraging them to go further or faster;
- The programmes could be measured and recorded;
- A demonstration of its capabilities had been given and members were very impressed;
- Each physiotherapy session was well attended by mixed ability individuals including some wheelchair users;
- New people joining the group were assessed by the physiotherapist;
- Physiotherapy was only one of the activities offered to members;
- Activities were paid for by the North Herts MS group;
- The group celebrated its 60th anniversary in 2018 with high tea at Knebworth Barns for 65 members;
- Each year they organised outings and a Christmas lunch;
- Funding relied on donations and participating in flag days;
- They had been included in the Tesco Token initiative;
- They were developing links with the MS Trust;

In response to questions from Members, Ms Gibbins advised:

- The North Herts MS Society was linked to the National Society;
- Members paid £5 per year to the National Society, of which the North Herts Society received a proportion;

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- The majority of funds were raised by volunteers locally;
- Funding was being requested from each of the Area Committees, based on where the membership live.

A Member commented that he was aware of the good work undertaken by the groups and of the great benefit that people with MS derived from exercise.

Members suggested that an application should be made to the Southern Rural Committee and drew attention to the County Councillor Locality Budgets.

The Chairman thanked Ms Gibbins for her presentation.

34 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - HITCHIN FUN CLUB

Audio recording – Start of item - 49 minutes 37 seconds

Prior to the item being discussed Councillor Judi Billing declared a declarable interest in that her grandchildren attended the Fun Club. This would not prevent her from listening to the presentation.

Ms Nicola Stevens, Treasurer, Strathmore Fun Club, thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee regarding their grant application as follows:

- The Fun Club was started by parents wanting childcare provision after school and was now 20 years old;
- The Club provided a safe and caring environment for children to play and explore and engage in different play activities;
- The setting was spacious and offered many types of activities as well a quiet area for children to sleep if required;
- It was a well run club;
- Salary costs were quite high as staff were fully qualified;
- The request was for £2,000 towards rent costs following an increase in the rent in April 2018 to £26 per day;
- Last year the Club made a loss of £3,700, previously profit had been in the region of £1,000 per year;
- The Club had a bond of £18,000 that was set aside to cover costs should the Club close;
- They had savings of £5,000, which were to cover any emergencies;
- They would be applying for County Councillor Locality Budget funding of £500.

In response to questions from Members, Ms Stevens advised:

- The Club employed 5 staff;
- It operated Monday to Friday from 3.15pm to 6.30pm.

A Member commented that this request was for rent paid to a school and that the District Council was indirectly being asked to give money to an organisation that was the responsibility of the County Council.

The Chairman thanked Ms Stevens for her presentation.

35 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - RHYTHMS OF THE WORLD

Audio recording – Start of item - 57 minutes 46 seconds

Prior to the item being discussed Councillor Clare Billing declared a declarable interest in that she had a friend who was a Trustee of Rhythms of the World. This would not prevent her from listening to the presentation.

Mr John Brierley, Rhythms of the World, thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee regarding the current position of the 2018 event as follows:

- They currently held grant funding of £3,756 previously awarded by the Committee for the planned one day event due to be held on 11 August 2018;
- This money was being held by the charity and was ring-fenced for use on next year's event;
- ROTW failed to get a Premises License for the 2018 event;
- Options going forward were:
 - To not hold a main event and concentrate on outreach work;
 - To hold an open and accessible public event in the town, in line with the wishes of the public;
 - To hold a smaller ticketed event in Bancroft/Butts Close, which would present additional logistic challenges and be more expensive;
 - To hold a themed event in different premises, similar to that held this year;
- There was a Committee meeting next week as well as meeting with the Police to review the events held this year and the prospects for next year.

In response to questions from Members Mr Brierley advised that:

- Applying for a Premises License was extraordinarily difficult for a volunteer organisation to achieve with the number of policies required and the demands placed on the organisers;
- The plan was to start early for next year and find out what can be achieved earlier;
- He was not sure whether there was anything that Members of this Committee could do to help with the licensing aspect;
- There was a clear choice between holding a public event or a managed, ticketed event.

Members acknowledged that the licensing requirements were difficult, but noted that this had been done before and that Councillors had helped with the process in the past. This could only be achieved by planning earlier.

They were concerned that there had been no communication with the local Councillors about the event this year.

The events held this year were enjoyed, but the advice was to communicate with Councillor more effectively.

The Chairman thanked Mr Brierley for his presentation.

36 GRANTS AND COMMUNITY UPDATE

Audio Recording – Start of item - 1 hour 9 minutes 13 seconds and

The Senior Communities Officer presented the report of the Communities Manager entitled Grants and Community Update and drew attention to the following:

Budgets

2017/18 Central Grant Budget Carried Forward	£13,131
2018/19 Central Grant Budget	£13,700
2018/19 Members Allowances (added to Central Budget	£ 1,800
Total available	£28,631

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the budgetary expenditure, balances and carry forwards from the Development and Visioning Budgets be noted;
- (2) That the actions taken by the Community Development Officer to promote greater community capacity and well-being Hitchin be endorsed.

REASON FOR DECISION: To keep Members of the Committee apprised of the latest developments in community activities in Hitchin.

37 GRANT APPLICATION - NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE MS SOCIETY

Audio Recording – Start of item - 1 hour 11 minutes 13 seconds

The grant application for North Hertfordshire MS Society had been split between the Area Committees based on where the Members lived.

Baldock and District Committee agreed to grant £740 on condition that the rest of the funding was agreed.

Members were supportive of the project.

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED: That grant funding of £1,500 be awarded to North Hertfordshire MS Society from the 2017/18 Discretionary Budget towards the cost of providing a specialist exercise bicycle.

REASON FOR DECISION: To improve services provided by local organisations and groups which are accessed by the community.

38 GRANT APPLICATION - STRATHMORE FUN CLUB

Audio Recording – Start of item - 1 hour 16 minutes 5 seconds

Prior to the item being discussed Councillor Judi Billing declared a declarable interest in that her grandchildren attended the Fun Club.

The Senior Communities Officer advised that it was not usual to give grant funding for running costs, however this was a one off payment to see the Club through a difficult period.

Members had previously expressed concern that the school had increased the rent and that indirectly this Committee would therefore be supporting an organisation that was the responsibility of the County Council.

Councillor Judi Billing advised that schools were being told to be more entrepreneurial. County Councillors were also being asked for grant funding to cover groups that used schools as a venue.

Members considered whether or not the award should be increased, but decided that, as this was a one off payment, they would only consider the amount requested.

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED: That grant funding of £2,000 be awarded to the Strathmore Fun Club from the 2017/18 Discretionary Budget to assist with the hire of the venue for the afterschool Club.

REASON FOR DECISION: To improve services provided by local organisations and groups which are accessed by the community.

39 REVIEW OF GRANT FUNDING FOR RHYTHMS OF THE WORLD

Audio recording – Start of item – 1 hour 20 minutes 31 seconds

The Senior Communities Officer advised that the Committee needed to consider whether the grant funding of £3,756 should be reclaimed from Rhythms of the World or remain with them for the 2019 event.

Members asked for clarification regarding the Grant Policy

The Senior Communities office advised that organisations had 2 years in which to spend any grant funding awarded and that organisations can only apply for funding bi-annually.

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED: That the grant funding of £3.756 previously awarded to Rhythms of the World not be reclaimed, but be retained for the 2019 event.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Hitchin Committee to support Rhythms of the World.

40 HITCHIN BID MANAGER

Audio recording – Start of Item – 3 minutes 0 seconds

Mr Tom Hardy, Hitchin BID Manager, thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee regarding the activities and issues in Hitchin and drew attention to the following:

Day to Day and Events

- There had been a lot of events and marketing events including the Food Festival and the Beach Day;
- They employed Rangers and night anglers in the town centre;
- The floral displays were in place;
- The BID had been engaging with the entire BID levy paying businesses through surveys, workshops, monthly newsletter; business visits, social media and business drop-ins.

BID Renewal

- They were currently working on the BID renewal that would cover the next 5 years;
- The Business Plan had been produced, which explained what the BID was, how it worked and how the money was being spent;
- The budget available to be spent in the town for the next 5 years was £1.6million and the business had chosen where this would be spent;
- There was room in the business plan for projects to evolve over the next 5 years;
- They were busy engaging with the BID levy payers, encouraging them to get involved in the BID process.

The BID Process

- All BID levy payers would receive a Notification of Ballot on 17 October 2018;
- The notification would include proxy vote forms;
- All BID levy payers would receive a Ballot Paper on 7 November 2018;
- They would have until 5pm on 5 December 2018 to return the Ballot Papers;

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- Declaration day would be on 6 December 2018, this would be the point at which it would be known if the BID would continue for a third term.

In response to questions from Members, Mr Hardy advised:

- That all of the required information for the BID renewal process had been supplied to the Local Authority;
- The Food Festival this year promoted the businesses in the town;

Members commented that the Food Festival was fantastic and passed congratulations regarding to this event to all involved.

They also commented that they hoped that the local businesses would take the opportunity to participate in the ballot for the renewal of the BID.

The Chairman thanked Mr Hardy for his presentation.

41 INFORMATION NOTE - CHURCHGATE UPDATE

Audio Recording – Start of item - 1 hour 30 minutes 41 seconds

The Committee received an Information Note entitled Churchgate Update.

The Chairman advised that, in discussions with the Deputy Chief Executive, it had been proposed that, in advance of any proposal being considered by Council, there would be a special meeting of this Committee which receive sight of the proposals. He asked Members to support this proposal.

Members were concerned that there was clear communication with the public and effective public consultation on any proposals and expressed concern that the historical steps be retained in any proposal going forward.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Information Note be noted;
- (2) That prior to any report regarding Churchgate proposals being considered by Council, a special meeting of the Hitchin Committee be arranged to consider those proposals;
- (3) That the Deputy Chief Executive be made aware of the importance of the historical steps in the Churchgate area and be requested to ensure that they and the inscriptions on them, are retained in any proposal for redevelopment;
- (4) That the Deputy Executive be reminded of the importance of effective communication with the public and public consultation on any proposals regarding Churchgate.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To enable the Hitchin Committee to comment on and give feedback regarding any proposals regarding Churchgate.

42 THE NEW WASTE CONTRACT

Audio Recording Start of item - 1 hour 38 minutes 5 seconds

The Chairman led a discussion regarding the new Waste Contract.

He advised that he had requested that the Executive Member for Waste, Recycling and Environment or a relevant Officer attend the meeting or that an information note be provided, however this was not possible.

He thought it important that Councillors from across the District receive updates on any improvements or progress made.

He further advised that the comments of this Committee would be forwarded to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting due to be held on 18 September 2018 at which the waste Contract would be discussed.

Members discussed the recent experiences of Hitchin residents regarding the operation of the Waste Contract and made the following observations:

- There were some responsibilities for emptying litter bins that seemed to sit with John O'Connor, whilst some responsibilities were with Urbaser these should be co-ordinated;
- Monitoring of waste bins should happen at least every 28 days, what monitoring was actually taking place?
- Public waste bins in well used places such as King George V playing fields were often overflowing. It was important to ensure sufficient provision of waste bins in these areas;
- Why was the provision of large bins to the Town Centre events not included in the contract:
- There are no signs of improvement in the residential waste collection;
- There are a number of specific issues as well as general issues such as which roads should have their bins collected, that seem to have fallen through the cracks between the outgoing contract and the new contract;
- Trust in the waste system is at an all time low;
- There were hotspots that continually experience problems;
- Residents still raised issues about the length of time it was taking to get through on the phones in order to report problems such as missed bins;
- One Member sought assurance that the data regarding those who had paid for the garden waste collection met all of the requirements of GDPR.

RECOMMENDED TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: That the comments made by the Hitchin Committee, as noted above, be considered when discussing the new waste contract at the meeting due to be held on 18 September 2018.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Hitchin Committee to inform the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of issues in the Hitchin area regarding the new waste contract.

43 WARD MATTERS AND OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS - MEMBERS' REPORTS

Audio recording – Start of Item – 1 hour 49 minutes 17 seconds

Outside Bodies

The Chairman informed Members that one suggestion would be for Councillor to prepare a short written report regarding the Outside Body that they are a representative on and present it to a future meeting.

Members were supportive of this idea and decided that the following reports be presented at the meeting due to be held on 4 December 2018:

Councillor Nicola Harris – British Schools Museum;

Councillor Bernard Lovewell – Hitchin United Charities;

Councillor Simon Harwood – King George V Playing Fields User Group;

Councillor Sam Collins - Hitchin Town Twinning.

Development at Blue Hearts Hockey Club

Councillor Harwood expressed concern at the number of lorries that would be travelling along local roads to service the development at Blue Hearts Hockey Club and that it was proposed to put in a Traffic Regulation Order to prevent people parking outside of their homes, so that the lorries could pass unhindered.

It was suggested that the Oughton and Priory Ward Councillors meet outside of this meeting to discuss the situation.

Members discussed that access to development sites was a regular problem and Councillor Stears-Handscomb advised that he had raised a question at the Overview and Scrutiny on this subject.

They also agreed that it was disappointing that Hertfordshire Highways did not make more strenuous representations.

RESOLVED: That the following Members be requested to prepare a short written report on the Outside Body that they are representatives on and present it to the meeting of this Committee due to be held on 4 December 2018:

- Councillor Nicola Harris – British Schools Museum;
- Councillor Bernard Lovewell – Hitchin United Charities;
- Councillor Simon Harwood – King George V Playing Fields User Group;
- Councillor Sam Collins - Hitchin Town Twinning.

REASON FOR DECISION: To keep the Hitchin Committee apprised of the work undertaken by Outside Bodies.

44 ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION AT FUTURE MEETINGS

Audio recording – Start of Item – 1 hour 51 minutes 41 seconds

The Chairman advised that there was a long list of items for discussion.

He hoped to be able to address some of these issues by way of Information Notes. Other items may need to be addressed formally at the Committee

Councillor Lovewell agreed to provide information on Air Quality in Hitchin to the next meeting.

Members requested that Surplus Land in Hitchin, the location of these sites and what progress has been made regarding disposal be added to the list.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Councillor Lovewell be requested to provide information regarding air quality in Hitchin to the next meeting due to be held on 4 December 2018.
- (2) That the following subject be added to the list of items to be discussed at future meetings:
Surplus Land in Hitchin – Location of sites and progress regarding disposal.

REASON FOR DECISION: To keep the Hitchin Committee informed about issues in Hitchin and North Hertfordshire.

The meeting closed at 10.05 pm

Chairman