

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

HITCHIN COMMITTEE

**Meeting held at Westmill Community Centre, John Barker Place, Hitchin
on 7 March 2017 at 7.30 p.m.**

MINUTES

PRESENT: *Councillors: Judi Billing (Chairman), Nicola Harris (Vice – Chairman), Ian Albert, Paul Clark, Elizabeth Dennis, Simon Harwood, Bernard Lovewell, Alan Millard, Frank Radcliffe, Martin Stears – Handscomb and Richard Thake.*

IN ATTENDANCE: *Simon Ellis (Development and Conservation Manager), Claire Morgan (Communities Officer), and Hilary Dineen (Committee and Member Services Officer).*

ALSO PRESENT: *At the start of the meeting County Councillors David Barnard and Derrick Ashley and 21 members of the public.*

55. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Allison Ashley and Adrian Smith.

56. MINUTES – 6 DECEMBER 2016

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 6 December 2016 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

57. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

No other business had been notified.

58. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

- (1) The Chairman thanked all who had attended Town Talk;
- (2) The Chairman welcomes all present at the meeting, particularly County Councillors David Barnard and Derrick Ashley and those who had attended to give a presentation;
- (3) The Chairman informed those present that, in accordance with Council Policy the meeting would be audio recorded;
- (4) 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.

59. HERTFORDSHIRE CONSTABULARY

Sergeant Steve Oliphant (Hertfordshire Constabulary) thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a verbal update on the issues being addressed by the Hertfordshire Constabulary in the Hitchin area.

Sergeant Oliphant gave the apologies of Chief Inspector Julie Wheatley, who was unable to attend this meeting.

In respect of Officers working in the area, he advised that Inspector Duncan Sales and PC Tina Ridley had retired and their replacements were Inspector Richard Lilley and PC Tony Fletcher

In 2015/16 the priorities for the team had been:

Burglary dwelling

Following a reduction in previous years there had been a large rise in offences since November last year. All offences were being investigated and a number of significant arrests had taken place in the last 2 months.

Business and Retail Crime

Prevention and detection was being ably supported by Hitchin BID and the rangers, for which he was grateful.

Vehicle Nuisance

A number of operations were undertaken targeting uninsured vehicles and excess speed

Street Meets

Local Officers and PCSOs had been tasked with engaging in regular street meets.

OWL

This was a very worthwhile system that provided updated to users, including details of vehicle issues, offenders and up to date security information. This system could also be used to contact the Police.

He would recommend that people sign up to this messaging system

Neighbourhood Watch

There were currently 9.500 members signed up to Neighbourhood Watch

Licensed Premises

The Police worked closely with Licensed Premises regarding night time economy issues in the Town Centre and all offenders of major crimes, including the highly publicised knife crime, had been identified and were being charged.

Crime Statistics

There had been an increase on the previous year of 209 reported crimes and members of the public were encouraged to report crime as this enabled the Police to know what was happening and to put resources where they were needed.

Focus for 2017/18

The main focus for 2017/18 would be Burglary Dwelling.

Members commented that there had been alarming reports regarding the downgrading of emergency calls by Hertfordshire Constabulary in order to massage figures and that this would be addressed with the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Sergeant Oliphant advised that he could not comment on the news reports other than to say that the full report had not been released to the press.

Members commented that residents were particularly concerned about the stabbing that took place outside a venue in the Town Centre recently and asked what steps were being taken to address the issues with particular establishments.

Sergeant Oliphant stated that he understood people's concern however they can be reassured as the people concerned with this incident had been arrested.

Within North Hertfordshire the Police had a community safety unit that focussed on issues regarding licensed premises. Sergeant Oliphant also advised that he had a meeting booked with the NHDC Licensing Officer and owner of the premises involved this week

He stated that issues regarding the licensed trade were taken very seriously and that they worked closely with NHDC Licensing Officers to look at and, where necessary, change the conditions of a particular licence.

It was important that crimes were reported to the Police, even if this was done anonymously through Crimestoppers.

Members acknowledged that Hitchin was a lively place, particularly in the evenings and stated that they did not wish this to change. They noted that crimes committed were not always associated with licensed premises and asked how this was dealt with.

Sergeant Oliphant advised that there were a number of officers on duty to deal with these issues, however this could be affected by the types of incident and the duties those officers had already carried out during the day. There were occasions when officers would be called away to deal with incidents elsewhere.

There was a plan in place to manage the night time economy which set out what to do and where and included visiting licensed premises to check that licensing conditions were being met. Officers were also supported by the Night Time Rangers and by the monitoring of CCTV.

Members were concerned that the non commercial aspects of the night time economy were monitored, such as activity on Windmill Hill and the effect of this on local residents.

Sergeant Oliphant advised that all areas of the Town centre were patrolled and that very few issues were reported on Windmill Hill and this was due to the work undertaken with other partner agencies including NHDC.

If the Police received reports about a particular area then action would be taken.

Members asked whether there were any areas of concern that they or the local community should be made aware of.

Sergeant Oliphant advised that there were no particular geographical areas of concern, however burglary dwelling was one of the priorities.

Members encouraged people to sign up to the OWL messaging service and asked that the crime statistics be sent to all Members of the Committee.

The Chairman thanked Sergeant Oliphant for his presentation and for the work he and his team undertake for the Hitchin area.

RESOLVED: That the Committee and Member Services Officer be requested to forward the crime statistics received from Sergeant Oliphant to all Members of this Committee via email.

60. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – PETITION REGARDING THE PATHWAY AT MILESTONE ROAD AND BEDFORD ROAD

Mrs Liz Whitelock thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee. She presented a petition containing 292 signatures requesting that the “dangerous, uneven and damaged footpath in the alleyway between Milestone Road and Bedford Road” be repaired. She gave a short verbal presentation in support of the petition.

Mrs Whitelock informed Members that the pathway between Milestone Road and Bedford Road was in a poor state of repair and that there had been several accidents.

She felt that no-one would take responsibility for the pathway or for the street lights.

This well used pathway had been patched, but not to a satisfactory standard.

Members commented that a petition with 292 signatures reflected the frustration of the local residents at the time taken to get something done about this pathway.

They acknowledged the work undertaken to patch the pathway but it remained in a poor state of repair with uneven paving causing a trip hazard, a slope at the Bedford Road end which in icy weather was a death trap and the lighting not working for some considerable length of time. There have been accidents on this pathway caused by these issues and residents should not be put in the position of having to use a potentially hazardous pathway.

Residents had spent many months tracing who was responsible for this pathway and eventually the County Council acknowledged that they were responsible.

County Councillor David Barnard thanked Mrs Whitelock and Members for bringing this to his attention. There had been some problem with identifying ownership of the pathway. The County Council eventually accepted ownership but there continued to be some problems identifying which department would take responsibility

He had instructed the Highways Officer to talk to Ringway, who had completed the patching work and have asked for it to be looked at as soon as possible and his had resulted in the tarmac patching of the pathway.

County Councillor Barnard advised that, to be considered as a trip hazard, any defect had to be more than 20 millimetres in depth despite this he had today instructed the Highways Officer to get this pathway repaired to a satisfactory standard as soon possible and undertook to maintain pressure until the work was completed.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Whitelock for her presentation.

Councillor Stears-Handscorn was pleased that the County Councillor was working with officers to resolve the issues.

Enquiries had been made about presenting the petition to the County Council, but they advised that this could not be done until after the upcoming election. He felt that this Committee should support the swift repair of this pathway and proposed that this Committee note the petition and further note that this pathway had been in a dangerous condition for a considerable time with several residents suffering serious injury on it. This Committee therefore calls on the County Council to fully repair this pathway as a matter of urgency.

County Councillor Barnard thanked the Committee for the support and advised that he was happy to liaise with this Committee and report the situation to the County Council's Executive Member to ensure that swift action was taken.

The proposal was seconded and it was

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the petition containing 292 signatures requesting that the "dangerous, uneven and damaged footpath in the alleyway between Milestone Road and Bedford Road" be noted;

- (2) That this Committee note that the pathway between Milestone Road and Bedford Road has been in a dangerous condition for a considerable time and that several residents had suffered serious injury whilst using it;
- (3) That Hertfordshire Highways be called upon to fully repair the pathway between Milestone Road and Bedford Road, Hitchin as a matter of urgency;
- (4) That the Committee and Member Services officer be requested to send a copy of this Minute together with the petition mentioned in (1) above to Hertfordshire Highways for urgent action and County Councillor David Barnard for information.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure that Hertfordshire Highways are aware of the condition of the pathway between Milestone Road and Bedford Road, Hitchin and are requested to take the necessary action to remedy.

61. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – CLEAN UP HITCHIN

Ms Rachel Campbell, Clean Up Hitchin, thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a verbal presentation regarding their grant application.

Ms Campbell advised Members that litter was a national problem and Clean Up Hitchin wanted to test out some local initiatives.

The bin installation were successful last year and people had asked for them to return and in 2017 the aim was to purchase 12 bin shells in bright green or yellow, wrap them in designs by local artist, designers and students and place them on existing bases on major walkways into the Town Centre. It was hoped that these bins shells could remain in place for a long time and that the local community could design their own wrap.

There was currently one butt bin outside Churchgate and, depending on the effectiveness of this, it was hoped to get another placed in a problematic area.

Other initiatives to be tested during 2017 were to wrap existing smart bins to make them more visible, chalking of gum spots on the High Street to make people more aware, trialling bespoke pavement stickers that encouraged use of the relevant bins and testing innovative “gumsticks” on lamp posts on which people could stick their gum instead of dropping it on the pavement.

The grant application was being requested to support the cost of providing the bin installations.

Members were fully supportive of this project and asked whether the Council’s decision to merge dog and waste bins would have an effect on this project.

Ms Campbell stated that the merging of dog and waste bins would not affect this project. She understood the need to save money and stated that it would be interesting to see the impact of this policy.

Members queried how the placing of these bins would be decided and whether the collection rota had been considered.

Ms Campbell advised that the aim was to place them on routes with the highest footfall, she had so far identified 10 sites and would welcome suggestions for further sites. The waste contract was currently being reviewed and it was a question of whether collection would be organised by zone or whether they would react to need. She had held a meeting with the Leader of the Council and it may be that a hybrid system of collection would be introduced.

Ms Campbell advised that it needed to be easier to report a full bin, as currently people get passed from pillar to post when trying to do so. The reporting system

should enable simple, concise and quick reporting which was then reacted to. Council's needed to enable residents to keep their local areas clean by preventing littering.

Members asked whether there was any way that littering from cars could be prevented.

Ms Campbell advised that, in respect of littering from cars, areas affected needed to be litter picked after which there may be some value in advertising how much the litter pick cost. It should be noted that a lot of road side waste appeared to have blown from commercial vehicles

County Councillor Thake advised that he was the Chairman of the Herts Waste Partnership, which had recently incorporated the fly tipping group. He hoped that there was now a better base from which to start building a better reporting system.

The Chairman thanked Ms Campbell for her presentation.

62. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – THE LIVING ROOM

Ms Amanda Morgan, The Living Room, thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a verbal presentation regarding their grant application.

Ms Morgan informed Members that the Living Room was an award winning addiction recovery charity that had been running for 17 years supporting people with all addictions including substance abuse, obsessive compulsive and eating disorders, self harm and gambling.

The treatment success rate was much higher than average for instance the success rate for alcohol addiction at the Living Room was 55 percent as compared with the national success rate of 35 percent. One reason for this level of success was that all of the counsellors had experience of recovery from addiction themselves.

In 2017/18 the commissioning contract with Hertfordshire County Council accounted for 38 percent of their budget, but they relied on charitable donations for the remainder.

The Living Room had submitted a grant application to help with the cost of delivering, in partnership with the North Herts Minority Ethnic Forum, a unique project to support people from ethnic minority groups suffering from addiction.

It was estimated that:

- 3 percent of the population was addicted to alcohol, equating to approximately 590 people from black, asian and ethnic minority groups living in North Hertfordshire;
- 1.1 percent of the population was addicted to gambling equating to 197 people;
- 1.2 percent of the population suffered from eating disorders, equating to 236 people.

Left untreated addiction caused disadvantages for the individual and for society including criminal activity, relationship breakdown, unemployment, ill health, passing on of behaviours, abuse and neglect.

Black, asian and minority ethnic groups were under represented in addiction services in Hertfordshire. This was in great part due to cultural issues in admitting a problem and seeking treatment through a fear of losing their status in the family and the community resulting in individuals trying to hide their problem.

This was a one year project to promote the project and raise cultural awareness about addiction within the black, asian and minority ethnic groups. A launch date was planned with culturally sensitive materials and the aim was to devise a discreet personal recovery programme.

This project to support black and ethnic minority groups was unique in Hertfordshire and the experience gained from this project would be shared with other addiction centres and commissioners across Hertfordshire.

The original budget for this project had been reduced significantly.

Members acknowledged that this was for hard to reach groups and asked why an outreach programme would be successful and how many people would be supported in one year

Ms Morgan advised they would base the project at the North Herts Minority Ethnic Forum's premises and that they already had established links with families and would provide translation services if needed.

They would ensure that the project was steered correctly and they would be willing to undertake home visits.

The service would be promoted to GP surgeries and other service providers and it was estimated that 60 people would attend the launch and that they could work with 20 people from Hitchin.

The plan was to work with volunteers in order to make the plan affordable.

The Chairman thanked Ms Morgan for her presentation.

63. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – HITCHIN ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION

Mr Paul Dee, Hitchin Allotment Association, thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a verbal presentation regarding their grant application.

Mr Dee informed Members that the Hitchin Youth Allotment group was a new project that would be run by the Hitchin Allotment Association.

It was a small youth project where children could learn about growing fruit and vegetables and get involved in a hands on way and aimed to:

- be interesting and fun
- attract children who may have limited opportunities
- build a sense of confidence, achievement and ownership
- be free to access.

The first year target was to involve 50 children, but this had already doubled to 100.

The Council owned plot was at the Old Hale Way Allotments and had been leased free of charge.

The groups already involved with the project included Priory School, Rainbows, Brownies and Guides.

There would be a strong focus on growing food and there would be other learning sessions including:

- building furniture from recycled materials;
- food technology, cooking and science;
- bees and other wildlife;
- employment in the sector.

The group had a volunteer project leader, which would be supported by teachers, leaders and parents. The Priory School had 12 – 15 children attending 2 hours fortnightly, Guides, Brownies and Rainbows had 24 – 28 children per pack attending 3 time per term each and there was a Saturday morning club once a month for those keen to learn more.

Hitchin Allotment Society had signed the lease for plot 4A in December 2016 and since then had been preparing the allotment including cutting beds, building compost bins and preparing pathways.

The aim was for to share best practice, build confidence and recognition for the young people involved and recruit and expand the project by building a relationship with the local newspaper, using Council channels of communication such as Outlook, visiting schools and other gardening groups and through social media.

The grant application had been for £1,200, but this had now been reduced to £500 for a one off set up cost thanks to the generosity of Hitchin Youth Trust and local businesses in Hitchin.

Members asked how children from Priory School were identified and whether there had been any communication with the triangle group, who worked with adults with Learning Disabilities.

Mr Dee advised that he was working with the Priory School Special Needs Co-ordinator as these were the main group of children to benefit from this project and that a member of the Association had been nominated to liaise with the Triangle Group.

Members queried whether volunteers would be DBS checked and asked what would happen to the produce.

Mr Dee advised that everyone had already been DBS checked and that they would be working with teachers and leaders, who will have already been checked and the produce would be eaten by the children and/or taken to food technology lessons.

The Chairman thanked Mr Dee for his presentation.

64. GRANTS AND COMMUNITY UPDATE

The Communities Officer presented the report of the Strategic Director of Finance, Policy and Governance entitled Grants and Community Update and drew attention to the following:

Budgets

Despite the 55 percent cut in grant budgets, the discretionary budget was very healthy, this was due to a large carry forward from 2015/16.

The current level of unallocated funds carried over from the Committee's 2015/16 budget was £11,400 and the unallocated funds from the 2016/17 budget was £9,297. Therefore there was a total of £20,697 available to allocate.

Micro Conference

The Communities Officer advised that she was in the process of organising a micro conference for those providing services to young people and children.

All Members would receive information about this event which would be held on the afternoon of 5 April 2017 at the Letchworth Centre for Healthy Living.

This was a networking and promotion event that would enable groups to find out about other groups and start discussing ways they could work together in order to maximise limited resources.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the budgetary expenditure, balances and carry forwards from the Development Ward Budgets as set out in Appendix A – Hitchin Area Committee budget for 2016/17 be noted;
- (2) That the Committee endorses the actions taken by the Community Officer to promote greater community capacity and well-being for Hitchin;
- (3) That the Communities Officer be requested to send all Members of the Hitchin Committee details of the micro conference for groups offering services to young people and children.

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

65. GRANT APPLICATION – CLEAN UP HITCHIN

Members asked for clarification regarding the number of bins the requested funding would provide.

Ms Campbell advised that a minimum of 10 bins would be provided, but it was hoped that more than the minimum could be provided for the same money.

RESOLVED: That grant funding of £2,400 be awarded to Clean Up Hitchin from the 2015/16 Discretionary Budget as funding towards the cost of Art Bin Installations.

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

66. GRANT APPLICATION – THE LIVING ROOM

The Communities Officer advised that the project would target marginalised communities in Hitchin and Letchworth and that the Letchworth Committee would be considering the grant application at their meeting tomorrow.

Members queried whether the project would be able to do ahead if the Letchworth Committee decided not to award funding.

The Communities Officer advised that, if the Letchworth Committee did not award funding she would contact the Living Room to find out whether part of the project could continue anyway. If this was not possible she would not pay out any funds agreed this evening.

It was proposed seconded and

RESOLVED: That grant funding of £2,500 be awarded to the Living Room from the 2015/16 Budget as funding towards the cost of providing an addiction recovery project for ethnic minorities.

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

67. GRANT APPLICATION – HITCHIN ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION

RESOLVED: That grant funding of £500 be awarded to the Hitchin Allotment Association from the 2015/16 Discretionary Budget as funding towards the cost of setting up a youth allotment project.

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

68. SECTION 106 AND UNILATERAL UNDERTAKINGS

The Development and Conservation Manager presented the report entitled Section 106 and Unilateral Undertakings.

He advised Members that there were two corrections to the report being that:

1. Due to a drafting error, Paragraphs 8.4.5, 8.4.6 and 8.4.7 should be deleted from the report.
2. The Paragraph numbers referred to in Paragraph 8 should be amended to Paragraphs 2.2 and 2.3.

The Development and Conservation Manager advised that the tables appended to the report only included money received and did not list anticipated receipts as there could be no guarantee they would ever be received.

The nature of Section 106 funding had changed over recent years and continued to do so.

The tariff approach whereby we could collect monies from small scale developments and spend it cumulatively on projects that fell within a general category was over. This was largely as a result of the pooling limit imposed on Section 106 funds from April 2015 and the banning of Section 106 funding for schemes of 10 dwellings or less.

Most, if not all, of the money collected over the coming years from Section 106 funding would already have a specific project already identified within the associated planning obligation resulting in the discretionary element diminishing over the next few years.

The successful system of allocating available funds to relevant projects to where those funds remained available and updating Area Committee's on an annual basis would be continued.

He drew attention to Paragraph 8.1.3 of the report and advised that the government had confirmed that a review of the Community Infrastructure Levy would be announced in Autumn 2017.

It appeared that this was likely to allow Local Authorities to set standard and very low Community Infrastructure Levy tariffs without the need to go through a Local Plan examination process and then rely on the existing Section 106 system on top of that, although there is no certainty of this.

Future Community Infrastructure Levy governance and spending would require an entirely new decision making process as to how money was allocated.

Members asked for clarification regarding the reasons for the refund detailed in Paragraph 8.4.4 of the report.

The Development and Conservation Manager advised that if funding is received through Unilateral Undertakings, these funds would not have a spend by date. Funds collected under Section 106 agreements always had an obligation to spend the funds within an agreed time limit.

S106 funding was monitored closely to try to ensure that funds were spent on projects before the pay back date and avoid refunds wherever possible therefore this was the first time that NHDC had ever had to repay Section 106 funding.

A Member advised that, where funds were unlikely to be spent, it was sometimes possible to discuss with the developer the possibility of varying the agreement to allow the spending those funds on a different project

Members asked for clarification regarding the reasons for the receipts far outweighing expenditure and queried whether there was any flexibility on the restrictive spending criteria.

The Development and Conservation Manager advised that there were many variable factors such as the length of the planning process and the length of time taken from application to actual development and this was one of the reasons for not including expected monies.

Developments could last for 100 years and the spending of monies collected needed to be spread over the lifetime of a development and, unless there was other funding in place for completion of a project, it was difficult to spend the monies collected.

Members asked what money was available to spend in Hitchin, whether the money spent on the Town Hall was from across the District, what involvement Members had in the decisions to spend the monies and whether there was any funding available to support playgrounds.

The Development and Conservation Manager advised that, in respect of monies available to spend in Hitchin, he would send details to all Members of this Committee.

Members had limited involvement in respect of spending as the monies had to be spent in the right area. He worked closely with the Communities Team to identify how funds could be used. He would however consider if there were any other ways that Members could be involved.

In respect of funding for playgrounds, Grounds Maintenance were aware of available Section 106 monies, but this could only be spent on capital works and could not be spent on revenue such as maintenance.

In respect of spending on Hitchin Town Hall, he was fairly certain that funding came from developments in Hitchin.

Members asked whether the monies allocated to Waste Collection and Recycling could be used by Clean Up Hitchin.

The Development and Conservation Manager advised that the monies collected under Waste Collection and Recycling were for the specific purpose of purchasing wheelie bins for that particular development.

Members commented that Charnwood House was in need of refurbishment and that this should be done sooner rather than later in order to protect the building.

The Communities officer advised that she would take this to the next Section 106 meeting for discussion.

Members were concerned that all funding for community halls had been allocated to Hitchin Town Hall, when there were local community halls in need of funding to repair the buildings and highlighted the needs of community halls such as Walsworth and St Michael's.

The Development and Conservation Manager advised that the funds allocated to Hitchin Town Hall had already been spent, but that future funding could be considered for the local halls.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Development and Conservation Manager and his team be thanked for the work undertaken regarding Section 106 and Unilateral Undertakings;
- (2) That the contents of the report titled Section 106 and Unilateral Undertakings be noted;
- (3) That the Development and Conservation Manager be requested to present a report regarding Section 106 and Unilateral Undertakings to this Committee on an annual basis;
- (4) That, other than where a contribution has been negotiated for a specific purpose or project, Ward Members of the area where Section 106 or Unilateral Undertaking funding is generated and the Area Committee be consulted prior to funding being allocated away from that area or from a village location to a town.
- (5) That the Development and Conservation Manager be requested to produce details of Section 106 and Unilateral Undertaking funding available to spend in Hitchin and send this to all Members of the Hitchin Committee via email;
- (6) That the Communities Officer be requested to raise, at the next S106 meeting, the refurbishment of Charnwood House as a potential project for Section 106 funding.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure that there is a robust system for negotiating and managing Section 106 and Unilateral Undertakings.

69. INFORMATION NOTE: NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE MUSEUM AND COMMUNITY FACILITY AT HITCHIN TOWN HALL

The Committee received an information note entitled North Hertfordshire Museum and Community Facility at Hitchin Town Hall.

Members commented that, as Hitchin was the first Fair Trade Town in Hertfordshire, tea and coffee served at the Town Hall should be Fair Trade and asked that the Contracts and Projects Manager be requested to consider this.

Members were extremely concerned at the very poor quality sound system installed in Hitchin Town Hall, as demonstrated during the Civic Reception. They asked that the Contracts and Project Manager be informed of their concerns and asked to take action to correct it.

Members queried the access to the Museum such as lifts for the disabled and when this facility might be open to the public and were concerned that details of the finances regarding income from events and hiring of the development be published.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Contracts and Project Manager be requested to investigate the poor sound system and take action to correct this;
- (2) That the Contracts and Project Manager be requested to ensure that, as Hitchin was the first Fair Trade Town in Hertfordshire, Fair Trade tea and coffee be made available in Hitchin Town Hall;
- (3) That the Contracts and Project Manager be requested to provide more details, via an email to all Members of this Committee, regarding issues such as finances relating to income from events and hiring of the Museum and Community Facility, proposed methods to overcome disability access issues and a date when the Museum may be open to the public.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure that the Members of the Hitchin Committee are kept fully apprised of all issues relating to the North Hertfordshire Museum and Community Facility at Hitchin Town Hall.

70. INFORMATION NOTE: REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE OF THE HITCHIN MUSEUM BUILDING

The Committee received an information note entitled Repairs and Maintenance of the Hitchin Museum Building.

Members were concerned that the condition survey had identified maintenance work to be carried out on the building, yet no work was planned and asked that details of the work carried out so far be emailed to all Members of this Committee.

They felt that the building should be used for more than storage and that there was an opportunity provide storage somewhere else and use the building for more effective purposes.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Head of Finance, Performance and Asset Management be requested to provide specific details, via an email to all Members of this Committee, of the work carried out to maintain the Hitchin Museum Building;
- (2) That the Head of Finance, Performance and Asset Management be requested to provide specific details, via email to all Members of this Committee, of the work so far undertaken and the work required to be undertaken in order to maintain the building currently used as Museum storage at Burymead.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure that the Members of the Hitchin Committee are kept fully apprised of all issues relating to the buildings currently either unused or being used as storage in Hitchin.

71. INFORMATION NOTE: UPDATE ON THE DECISIONS REGARDING THE GREEN SPACE STRATEGY

The Committee received an information note entitled Update on the Decisions Regarding the Green Space Strategy.

Members commented that they had undertaken work in the local community asking for people to take on the play areas, but the response was not encouraging and queried what consultation was being undertaken with the public regarding the search for groups to take on responsibility for play areas.

They noted that Section 106 funding had been released to Parish Councils for play areas and that this caused a disadvantage to Hitchin, which was reliant on the District Council to fund them.

Members also commented that there were other organisations that could be approached such as North Herts Homes and that if they would consider taking on play areas that were to be kept open, consideration could be given to using the money saved on those play areas to keep others open.

A Member commented that the play areas received a lot of use and expressed concern that parishes had over the years been recompensed for services that were carried out by NHDC in the unparished areas. If these were now being withdrawn in Hitchin and other areas, the Area Committees should be enabled to consider taking on play area services.

The Committee was extremely supportive of the idea and commented that any innovative and out-of-the-box thinking should be welcomed. They considered that in order to prevent any further delay a small number of Members should be authorised to represent the Committee and make enquiries on how to take it forward.

It was proposed and seconded that Councillors Stears-Handscomb and Harwood be nominated to do this.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Parks and Countryside Development Manager be requested to provide details of the methods being used to publicise the search for groups to take on responsibility for play areas;
- (2) That the Parks and Countryside Development Manager be requested to investigate whether groups or organisations would consider taking on responsibility for play areas that were due to remain open and if this was successful, consideration be given to using the money saved on those play areas to keep others open;
- (3) That this Committee consider how it can take a leading role to keep play areas open and investigate whether they can express an interest in running some of the play areas within Hitchin;
- (4) That Councillors Simon Harwood and Martin Stears-Handscomb be authorised to represent the Hitchin Committee when making enquires regarding all aspects related to (1) above.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Hitchin n Committee to consider all options open to them regarding the operation of play areas.

72. HITCHIN TOWN CENTRE MANAGER

Mr Keith Hoskins, Hitchin Town Centre Manager, thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a verbal presentation regarding the issues and activities in Hitchin Town Centre as follows:

Relocation of Office

The Hitchin BID had already moved to the new premises at 1a Churchyard with the Hitchin Initiative relocating in the next two weeks from 27 Churchyard and Hitchin Markets moving from their offices shortly.

There would be an official opening of the new premises on 7 April 2016 which Councillors were welcome to attend.

Next Generation Group

This would be started next month and would be looking at the future management of Hitchin Town Centre.

Business Rates

Business Rate bills had been received and there had been some changes, which had resulted in some business paying less, namely those with rateable values under £12,000, and some more. Businesses were being encouraged to talk to Hitchin Initiative, Hitchin BID and NHDC officers, who had been extremely helpful.

Car Parking

A meeting was held before Christmas, with Councillor Cunningham present, at which consultation with the Area Committee and Hitchin BID was discussed. The concern was that little had been heard since and that increased tariffs would be introduced before proper consultation with these parties.

Consideration also needed to be given to the time it would take to consult with the various interested parties and that these consultations may well produce more suitable alternatives, as they had in the past.

Upcoming Issues

- The Town Guide was in the process of being printed;
- An events brochure for this year had just been issued;
- The Hitchin Festival Brochure was being prepared;
- There would be projects regarding the public realm;
- Consideration was still being given to ways to bring the Dell back into use;
- Parking issues in Churchyard and Bucklersbury had been difficult to sort out with Highways Officers;

Waste Contract

The Council was in the process of renegotiating the waste contract and an annual chewing gum clearance had been requested as part of that contract.

Planning Application – Hermitage Road

There were some concerns regarding the Planning application in Hermitage Road

Members asked whether the ownership and restrictions for use of the Dell had been resolved.

Mr Hoskins advised that members of the project group were in touch with the family trustees who had indicated they were willing for the project to move forward.

Members expressed concern that consultation, even with Members, had not taken place regarding the car parking tariff charges.

Mr Hoskins advised that discussions had previously taken place regarding the possibility of cheaper charges at certain times of the day, commuter parking, and employee parking but he was unsure whether any of these had yet been considered.

The Chairman thanked Mr Hoskins for his presentation.

73. WARD AND OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS – MEMBERS’ REPORTS

No Ward or Outside Organisation issues were discussed.

74. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION AT FUTURE MEETINGS

Infrastructure for Large Developments in Hitchin

Councillor Stears-Handscomb advised that there were likely to be issues regarding the infrastructure for proposed large developments as identified in the Local Plan such as that at Highover Farm. It was therefore appropriate for this Committee to have an input into the infrastructure for Highover Farm and other large developments in Hitchin through the development of master plans.

RESOLVED: That this Committee investigate ways in which it can have effective input in the master plans for proposed large developments that affect Hitchin.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Hitchin Committee to have input into the master plans for proposed large developments that would affect Hitchin.

The meeting closed at 9.50 p.m.

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Chairman