

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

HITCHIN COMMITTEE

**MEETING HELD IN THE PETER MORRISON HALL, BENSLOW MUSIC SCHOOL,
BENSLOW LANE, HITCHIN ON TUESDAY, 5TH MARCH, 2019 AT 7.30 PM**

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Clare Billing (Vice-Chairman), Val Bryant, Paul Clark, Sam Collins, Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, Nicola Harris, Simon Harwood, Mike Hughson, Bernard Lovewell, Martin Stears-Handscomb and Richard Thake

In Attendance: Claire Morgan (Senior Communities Officer) and Amelia McNally (Committee and Member Services Officer)

Also Present: At the commencement of the meeting approximately 15 members of the public, including registered speakers.

64 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – Start of Item – 50 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ian Albert and Judi Billing.

65 MINUTES - 4 DECEMBER 2018

Audio recording – Start of Item 1 minute 3 seconds

The Vice- Chairman advised that the Minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2018 had been tabled and that, to allow time for Members to read them, they would be agreed at the next meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2018 be approved at the next meeting of this Committee.

66 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording- Start of Item – 1 minute 37 seconds

There was no other business notified.

67 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – Start of Item – 1 minute 42 seconds

- (1) The Vice-Chairman welcomed those present at the meeting, especially those who had attended Town Talk and to give a presentation;
- (2) The Vice-Chairman advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded;

- (3) The Vice-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 Vice-Chairman advised that in addition to the agenda items as listed that there would be an additional public speaker – Mr John Wyer, and also an update following a meeting that Cllr Judi Billing and Cllr Ian Albert attended with Bim Afolami MP on Future High Street Fund and the draft bid.
- (5) The Vice-Chairman informed the Committee that Guy Westwood the Hitchin Safer Neighbourhood Team Sergeant would present Hertfordshire Constabulary's Annual Report.

68 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - HERTFORDSHIRE CONSTABULARY

Audio recording – Start of Item – 3 minutes 27 seconds

Sergeant Guy Westwood (Hitchin Safer Neighbourhood Team Sergeant, Hertfordshire Constabulary) thanked the Vice-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.

- Various changes had been made to the team – Sergeant Guy Westwood had returned to Hitchin after spending four years as the Royston Team Sergeant. Tony Phillips was named as the new Chief Inspector who had taken over from Julie Wheatley;
- Mr John Hammond was formally thanked for all of his work with the Neighbourhood Watch Team;
- A new computer system 'Athena' had been installed, which allowed communication with 11 other forces. Whilst they had experienced teething problems, going forward, it was felt that it had massive potential to assist with sharing information;
- Figures provided to the Committee were a comparison from the period 1 April 2017 to 4 March 2018 to the present date;
- Online crime recording meant there were more ways to report crime. North Herts had seen an overall 7% increase in reported crime;
- A slight increase in non-dwelling burglaries, theft from motor vehicles, theft from a shop and domestic violence had been recorded;
- Hertfordshire Constabulary were working on increasing methods of reporting and offering crime prevention measures such as tool marking events and shed alarms;
- A winter prevention intervention campaign had been launched in October 2018;
- Implementation of a Gangs and Schools team to present the dangers of carrying knives to the relevant age groups in schools;
- Assault - both verbal and physical had increased;
- There had been a reduction in residential burglaries, theft from motor vehicles, theft from shops and domestic violence. Criminal damage – a lot of work had taken place, however, there was still more to do; and
- Presentations were being made to local schools regarding knife crime.

In response to the presentation, questions were received from the following Councillors:

- Councillor Richard Thake;
- Councillor Nicola Harris;
- Councillor Paul Clark;
- Councillor Bernard Lovewell;
- Councillor Clare Billing.

Sergeant Westwood responded to the queries posed.

The Senior Communities Officer was requested to liaise with Sergeant Westwood in order to set up at a meeting between the Police, Hitchin Councillors and local members of the public.

It was suggested by Hertfordshire Constabulary that Hitchin Committee, going forward, informed of their priorities of statistical information required, given that one statistic that was felt to be missing and would be extremely helpful, was a conversion of a firm set of figures analysing the success and failure rate within their ward.

The Vice-Chairman thanked Guy Westwood for his informative presentation and attendance at the meeting.

69 PRESENTATION FROM THE CHURCHGATE RESURGENCE GROUP

Audio recording – Start of Item – 39 minutes 44 seconds

Mr John Wyer of the Churchgate Resurgence Group thanked the Vice-Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a verbal presentation supported with plans and drawings including:

- Hitchin was an historic market town;
- The future of retail was changing;
- The Future High Streets Fund gave an opportunity to reset Hitchin Town Centre to adapt to trends;
- To make High Streets relevant and vibrant in the era of online shopping an experience based economy was needed that would give people a reason to come into town;
- The refurbishment of Churchgate and Hitchin Market could be transformative and benefit the whole District;
- NHDC owned the freehold of Churchgate and the surrounding land, therefore was in a key position to realise the potential of the whole area;
- Churchgate Resurgence PB had put forward a vision for Churchgate and the surrounding area;
- The vision was for flexible sized retail space as well as social and market sale housing;
- A hub for arts and wellness could provide North Herts with an alternative to St Albans;
- An adaptive riverside walk would enhance footfall and the natural flow around the town;
- Rationalising and increasing parking would increase capacity and generate more income;
- A new creatively curated market was proposed in a light airy building including street food. This would be a competitive alternative to places like London and St Albans;
- They had been inspired by Altringham, where a failing High Street had had a completely positive turn around, due to provision of a market charging low rent, shop leases and had been given an attractive, co-ordinated look. All of this had been achieved for less than £1 million;
- North Herts needed to find ways of attracting and keeping people in the face of competition.

The following Members entered into the debate or asked questions:

- Councillor Paul Clark;
- Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb;
- Councillor Simon Harwood;
- Councillor Richard Thake.

The Churchgate Resurgence Group were thanked for the work they were carrying out and it was hoped the momentum would continue.

The Vice-Chairman thanked Mr Wyer for his informative presentation and attendance at the meeting.

The Vice-Chairman read a statement from Councillor Ian Albert as follows:

“Reasons why North Herts Councillors should support a Hitchin FHS bid for reviving Hitchin’s town centre;

Hitchin was the market town and retail hub of North Herts, but its market is failing and the future of retail is changing.

The Government’s new Future High Street Fund presented an opportunity to reset Hitchin’s town centre to adapt to future needs and trends.

- A new experience-based economy was required to keep town centres vibrant, and a revitalised curated market with a new street food hall could be the catalyst for this in Hitchin’
- For North Herts to thrive, each town needed to have a strong, differentiated and complementary offer;
- The new Churchgate Resurgence ideas offered opportunities for addressing retail decline in North Herts in a way that did not undermine other towns;
- The ideas also aimed to create local employment and address housing needs, including a proportion of social housing;
- They aimed to provide a new community hub focused on the arts and wellness, and to cater for a broad age range;
- A bid for Hitchin also offered opportunities to address public transport and parking issues which would allow greater connectivity.

Any scheme for Churchgate must represent value for money for local residents and be affordable. There were also positive ripples that the Churchgate improvements could produce for North Herts such as:

- building Hitchin’s attraction as a tourist destination;
- enhancing its historic character;
- generating a greater contribution to North Herts revenue (Hitchin provides 71% of NHDC’s parking revenue); and finally
- the domino effect that could result in this project becoming a beacon for Hertfordshire.”

It was proposed and seconded that this statement, with the words “Hitchin market is struggling” replacing the words “Hitchin Market is failing” in the second sentence be endorsed and considered by Council.

RESOLVED: That the statement presented by Councillor Albert above, amended as proposed, be considered by Council.

70 HITCHIN BID MANAGER

Audio recording – Start of Item – 57 minutes 28 seconds

Mr Tom Hardy, Hitchin BID Manager, thanked the Vice-Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a verbal presentation regarding the issues and activities in Hitchin Town Centre and drew attention to the following:

BID Renewal

The BID renewal was successful and would run for a further 5 years;

Plans and Events

- Floral displays would continue;
- Developing a tourism strategy;
- Advertising for two Town Centre Managers;
- Welcoming and Liaising with businesses – ambassador role, concentrating on public well being rather than security
- Free Cardboard collection;
- Christmas Lights, a tender was being undertaken this year;
- Represent the business voice on issues such as parking.
- CCTV was an on-going subject

The Vice-Chairman thanked the Hitchin BID Manager for his presentation.

71 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - HOMESTART HERTFORDSHIRE

Audio recording – Start of Item – 1 hour, 15 minutes 54 seconds

Lynn Clarke, a volunteer trustee and treasurer for Home-Start Hertfordshire thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a verbal presentation regarding the grant funding application for Home-Start Hertfordshire as follows:

- A local, family support charity that offered emotional and practical help to parents with at least one child under the age of 12.
- Prior to being a county wide scheme, they operated as 9 separate schemes, but in 2016 following the loss of a substantial Herts County Council grant they all came together to eliminate any duplicated costs to become more efficient.
- They now operated in six areas in Hertfordshire including North Hertfordshire.
- Provided a family support service with the aim of helping families in desperate need of support, and improving their children's outcomes.
- A team of staff who train, co-ordinate and supervise their volunteers. The volunteers were all parents themselves and had to undergo a 9 week training course to provide them with the required tools to support. Once trained, the volunteers were then matched with a family in need, and would then visit that family in their home weekly.
- Family group parenting classes were provided in the County.
- "Big Hopes, Big Futures" programme had been set up to assist parents to prepare their children for school.
- Currently supported 16 families in North Herts, however, there were still 15 families that were in urgent need of aid, five of these were based in Hitchin for which they wished to use the grant funding if their request was successful to support.
- An approximation of £2,285 was given, this would allow them to provide support for each family for 3 months. Home-Start would match fund the amount, in order to continue assistance for a further 3 months – to meet the average time required to support a family.

The Vice-Chairman thanked Lynn Clarke for her presentation.

72 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - HITCHIN ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION

Audio Recording – Start of Item – 1 hour, 22 minutes 55 seconds

Mr Paul Dee, Secretary of Hitchin Allotments Association and Project Leader for Hitchin Youth Allotment thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a verbal presentation regarding the grant funding application for Hitchin Allotment Association as follows:

- Hitchin Youth Allotment supported young people to learn how to grow and cook fruit and vegetables, this was done on an allotment in Hitchin in a very hands on way;
- encouraged healthy eating and a healthy attitude to food;
- contributed to tackling issues such as eating disorders, diabetes and childhood obesity;
- connected young people with outdoors, the environment and with wider society by linking up with other local good causes;
- built the children's confidence providing a positive knock on effect to their school and academic life;
- focussed on supporting children with special educational needs, with both severe and moderate learning difficulties, but also connected with all children who were interested; and
- ran entirely on a voluntary basis.

When Home-Start were setting up in March 2017, NHDC had donated £500 funding as a contribution to their set up costs. Originally aimed for 40 children to be involved through occasional visits, but the project had proved much more successful and the numbers had increased greatly, over 280 children had been involved that year:

- Over 350 children had been involved over the past couple of years.
- Linked up to the Priory School. Four groups of children with SEN support attend fortnightly as part of their curriculum.
- Last year they piloted a very successful after school club with a food tech teacher – part growing and part cooking. This started fortnightly, but due to popularity, it was now a weekly event.
- In addition, 8 of Hitchin's uniformed youth groups also attended on a regular basis.
- They donated surplus produce to a Red Cross Food Bank.
- Achieved the Royal Horticultural Society's highest level of accreditation for school gardening groups.
- Last year were nominated in the RHS awards and were one of four national finalists, from 350 nominations.

Success had led to much needed expansion, for which the grant funding request was required:

- £250 for Child friendly compost bins, so they could better understand the composting process.
- £350 to create a study and work area with folding, removable tables.
- £80 to complete the renovation and build a fruit area.
- £250 to fully establish cooking activities.

A total of £930 for project/development costs that would pay back over many years and for several hundred children.

The Vice-Chair thanked Mr Dee for his very informative presentation.

73 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - WALSWORTH FESTIVAL

Audio Recording – Start of Item - 1 hour, 32 minutes 36 seconds

Councillor Bernard Lovewell declared a declarable interest and left the room for the duration of the presentation.

Kay Tart, the Secretary of Walsworth Festival Association thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a verbal presentation regarding the grant funding application for Walsworth Festival as follows:

- Been an annual event since 1974 and was now celebrating their 65th anniversary.
- Local performance groups were invited in order to raise their profiles.
- Raised the profile of both the local church St Faiths and the Walsworth Community Centre, where some of the activities would take place.
- The event brought the local community together.
- Provided an opportunity for local charities and organisations to promote their activities and raised funds by hiring stalls.

The funding was required to underwrite the cost of putting on the annual Walsworth Festival. There was an expected £4,500 debt, but the event was hoping to raise approximately £2,000.

In response to questions from the following members:

Councillor Richard Thake
Councillor Paul Clark
Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg
Councillor Bernard Lovewell

If the event were to be more successful and significantly more funds than anticipated were raised, a small donation would be made to some community groups. However, realising that a request for more funds for 2020 festival would not be feasible, it was hoped that with their different approach to the event, and raising extra funds through selling brochures and hiring of stalls, they would be, going forward, self sufficient.

The Festival would take place on Sunday 19 May 2019, not 10 May, as stated in the report.

In response to Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg's question on his view of stability of the event, and as to whether he thought additional monetary support in 2020 would be required, Councillor Bernard Lovewell stated that he felt that this should not be of concern. He further commented, that at least for the next two years, whilst felt it would be a finely balance operation, was secure as it was going to be, and, along with a lot of extra work, would sustain itself.

The Vice-Chairman thanked Kay Tart for her presentation.

74 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - HITCHIN FOOD RESCUE HUB

Audio Recording – Start of Item - 1 hour, 45minutes 43 seconds

Emma Goulding thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a verbal presentation regarding the grant funding application for Hitchin Food Rescue Hub as follows:

- Whilst based on the model of the highly successful “Best Before Café in Letchworth Garden City and sharing experiences and best practice, financially both projects were independent from each other.
- Grant funding requested would be to support initiation of the business - set up costs - get the volunteer training up and running, purchase equipment and support marketing.
- A unique empowering idea - people coming together over food.
- 1.9 million tonnes of business food waste represented back to the public in order that it is not wasted.
- A “Food Boutique” which redistributes the food that would otherwise end up in landfill, thus solving an environmental catastrophe.
- Presently were in discussion regarding confirmation of venue in which to operate, but looking to run the business from Church House, a centrally located community facility.
- The Café would operate one day a week, which was most likely to be a Thursday.
- Felt that it would become a self-sustaining enterprise.

Councillor Val Bryant stated she felt that the project was very exciting and it brought with it a great community feel, diversity of ages and was extremely thought provoking.

The Vice-Chairman thanked Emma Goulding for her presentation.

75 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - RHYTHMS OF THE WORLD

Regina Van Der Leeuw thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a verbal presentation regarding the activities and update on Rhythms of The World.

It was confirmed that as Rhythms of the World had not taken place last year, that there was plans in place for a one day event which would be held on 29 June 2019 - a concert of world music - a drumming workshop would also take place.

The Hitchin museum, which would be opening around the same date, had approached Rhythms of the World to suggest that there could be a collaboration of music to promote a positive festival this year, show case the event to make one amazing day.

Music acts would perform within local pubs as in previous years.

Councillor Sam Collins and Cllr Richard Thake made mention of the poor acoustics in Hitchin Town Hall. It was, however, reported that Steve Crowley (Service Director – Commercial) had informed Cllr Ian Albert that there would be acoustic improvement works taking place, these amends would commence within the next couple of weeks.

The Chairman thanked Regina Van Der Leeuw for her informative presentation.

76 GRANTS & COMMUNITY UPDATE

Audio recording – Start of Item – 1 hour, 53 minutes 44 seconds

The Communities Officer reported that Hitchin Hackspace, who had previously been awarded funding of £5,000 by Hitchin Committee in order to renovate their building, had now been completed all of the works, and their first week in business had taken place.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Committee provide the funding for two “No Ball Games” signs for the Woodside car park from any unallocated budgets;
- (2) That any unspent funds from the 2018/19 financial year be allocated to Community Initiatives;
- (3) That the Communities Officer be requested to bring information from officers to the Committee on the condition and plans for disposal of the former Hitchin Museum Building; and
- (4) That the actions taken by the Community Development Officer to promote greater community capacity and well-being for Hitchin be endorsed.

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

77 GRANT APPLICATION - HOME-START HERTFORDSHIRE

Audio recording – Start of Item – 1 hour, 59 minutes 12 seconds

RESOLVED: That grant funding of £2,300 be awarded to Home-Start Hertfordshire to assist with costs of providing emotional and practical support of five families in Hitchin.

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

78 GRANT APPLICATION - HITCHIN ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION

Audio recording – Start of Item – 1 hour, 58 minutes 31 seconds

RESOLVED: That grant funding of £1,000 be awarded to Hitchin Allotment Association to assist with costs of developing the youth allotment.

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

79 GRANT APPLICATION - WALSWORTH FESTIVAL

Audio recording – Start of Item – 1 hour, 54 minutes

Having previously declared a declarable interest, Councillor Bernard Lovewell remained in the room for discussion, but did not take part in the vote.

RESOLVED: That grant funding of £2,000, be awarded to Walsworth Festival to underwrite the cost of the annual community event. The amount granted being £500 more than requested in order to assist the event for a longer period of time.

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

80 GRANT APPLICATION - HITCHIN FOOD RESCUE HUB

Audio recording – Start of Item – 2 hours, 15 seconds

RESOLVED:

- (1) That grant funding of £2,000 be awarded to Hitchin Food Rescue Hub to assist with start-up costs; and
- (2) That the Community Engagement Officer report back to the Committee on progress of Hitchin Food Rescue Hub.

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

81 WARD MATTERS AND OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS - MEMBERS' REPORTS

Audio recording – Start of Item – 2 hours, 5 minutes 8 seconds

RESOLVED: That Members be requested to forward written reports regarding their work with outside bodies to the Acting Committee and Member Services Manager, these reports will be circulated to all Members of the Committee and included in the next available agenda for information.

REASON FOR DECISION: To keep the Hitchin Committee apprised of the work and activities in wards and associated with outside bodies.

82 ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION AT FUTURE MEETINGS

Audio recording – Start of Item – 2 hours, 5 minutes 42 seconds

After debate and discussion, Hitchin Committee agreed that it would be extremely useful to receive a written report by way of an Information Note for the following item to be discussed at future meeting of this Committee:

Hitchin CCTV Surveillance Findings.

Tuesday, 5th March, 2019

Audio recording – Start of Item – 2 hours, 9 minutes 23 seconds

That being the last Hitchin Committee Meeting in the Civic Year, The Chairman thanked Councillor Bernard Lovewell for all of his hard work. Councillor Lovewell stated that he started out where he began at Hitchin some 20 years ago and wished everyone continued good luck in always working so well together.

The meeting closed at 9.50pm.

Chairman