

**Town Talk Notes– Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> June 2009 – 6.15 pm – 7.15pm @ Benslow Music Trust, Benslow Lane, Hitchin.**

The Chair, Councillor Judi Billing, welcomed everybody to the Town Talk. She also welcomed the officers from Stevenage who were observing. John Robinson, Strategic Director Customer Services, was also in attendance. The next Town Talk, before a Hitchin Area Committee meeting, will be on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> July, 2009, at Christ Church Hall, Bedford Road, Hitchin.

**Issues raised by members of the public present**

Cigarette Ends  
Museums  
Roads

**Cigarette Ends**

A resident raised an item referring to the 'disgusting' mess outside public houses and other areas of the town re cigarette ends. The question was raised whether parking attendants could double up as litter wardens. John Robinson said that Parking Enforcement Officers at the moment simply do parking, although investigations were being carried out with regard to officers being given more powers.

Through the Hitchin Bid, three Town Rangers are to be employed, and it may be part of their duties to check on businesses and make sure that outside their premises are kept tidy and cigarette end receptacles emptied. Public education could also be part of their duties alongside the work that NHDC undertakes. Cleansing is carried out daily within the town and with problems rectified within 1 hour target time. It was emphasised that if there are certain areas that cause concern people could call the Customer Service Centre, 01462 474000.

**Roads**

A questioner asked about the strategy for dealing with road repairs around Hitchin, and named a few areas.

Councillor David Billing said that the service utility companies have the power to dig up the roads basically as they please and Herts Highways can only influence. It perhaps needs a study of how things could be planned better, for example gas main works being done at nights and/or weekends.

There is a potholes hotline that people can contact. It was suggested that perhaps Herts Highways would come a Town Talk or Committee meeting.

**Museums**

Hitchin Historical Society advised the meeting that correspondence was being sent for the attention of John Robinson and Councillor Tricia Gibbs, stating that with the knowledge and expertise in the history of Hitchin that members of the Society have, is a good reason why they should be fully involved in the process and terms of reference for the forthcoming feasibility study. It was noted that they wanted to be constructive in the process.

It was also advised that there was very strong support for the Town Hall remaining as a public facility for social activities and it must be remembered that this building had been originally donated to the town and that there were covenants on the building for social use for the residents of Hitchin.

Members present agreed that Hitchin Area Committee should also be involved in the groundwork and preparation of terms of reference and that a Facilities Working Group be formed.

John Robinson advised that all those with an interest will be consulted and involved.

A question was asked as to why the conversion of the Town Hall seemed to be the only option being considered for a new Museum, how can it be proved that this was the best way forward if no other option was being considered.

It was also asked if there was discussion taking place with the Library for example and that the Trustees of the Town Hall need to take advice re the structural state of the Town Hall and that part of the feasibility study should include a structural survey.

John Robinson advised that there were a number of options but due to the urgency of this matter they had been narrowed. He also pointed out that the trustees will probably carry out an their own structural survey.

It was also asked why it needed to be a 'District Museum' why could Hitchin not retain it's own Museum. It was felt that Hitchin was a poor relation and that Letchworth in particular had benefited from a number of new builds.

The involvement of the public was also a big factor in the consultancy process and the question was asked 'what if Hitchin residents, oppose the Town Hall being transferred to a Museum'?

John Robinson advised that all findings would be presented to the Cabinet at NHDC for consideration.

### **Additional Issues**

#### **Queen Mother Theatre**

A representative from the Theatre said that they were no longer using the Dell as an open air theatre for a number of reasons and had found an alternative site. They were concerned though about the security involved with the proposed High Ropes project for the Dell. Judi said that all this would be part of the feasibility study and that there had already been initial concerns re this matter.

#### **Subzero**

It was mentioned that somebody should have informed Subzero that they required planning permission for the large signs they have put up. They expect there to be an enforcement notice or a planning application submitted. The question was raised 'was this a conservation area'?