



**Town Talk Notes– Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> March, 2009 – 6.15 pm – 7.15pm @ Benslow Music Trust, Benslow Lane, Hitchin.**

The Chair, Councillor Judi Billing, welcomed everybody to the Town Talk. The next Town Talk, before a Hitchin Area Committee meeting, will be on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> June, 2009 at Benslow Music Trust, Benslow Lane, Hitchin.

Judi also welcomed Councillor Tricia Gibbs, Portfolio for Community Engagement and Rural Affairs, Councillor Claire Strong, Portfolio for Policy and Green Issues, and Councillor Michael Muir, Chair of Baldock Area Committee.

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

Litter  
Churchgate  
Museum  
Church Parking  
Police  
High Ropes Project  
Town Talk

**Museum**

A questioner said he understood a feasibility study had been carried out and he felt that there had been a lack of public consultation.

Judi said that she had had a very positive meeting with representatives from Hitchin Historical Society and a round table meeting has been suggested as a way forward so that the issues can be discussed fully. Hitchin Forum is spearheading requests for this meeting.

Councillor Gibbs stated that there had been no feasibility study done yet and there would be consultation with all the interested parties and other community groups.

Councillor Strong said that an FSR (Fundamental Service Review) of the Museums Service in 2004 in North Herts had recommended this approach. The Council having to find savings year on year, are looking at a single Museum for North Herts and ways to achieve this to be completed in two years.

Councillor Gibbs added that the Museum Project Board, overseeing this five year project, has been working on this for over 3 years and the two year timing fits the timetable.

Judi asked had a decision been made to use the Town Hall without a feasibility study?

John Robinson, Strategic Director of Customer Services, stated that Cabinet had in effect requested a full business case, feasibility study and report back to Cabinet for a decision.

On the Collection Centre issue money had been spent on improving environmental conditions for the collections and looking at a joint collection centre with Letchworth Garden City Foundation. These discussions continue.

A questioner raised that there are issues around the Town Hall with appalling decor and paintwork and it seems only emergency repairs are being done. They understood that there was a budget deficit in relation to the Town Hall and had several different sets of figures which they questioned.

They also raised the question of Trustees and Councillor Lovewell said nothing had been signed yet and he will look closely at the information before signing.

Some Hitchin residents feel that as that there other Museums in the District the proposed District Museum can't be so called. It was stated that there are other museums in the District which are not run by NHDC.

### **High Ropes**

Guy and Elias from the High Ropes project gave an update on the position at the moment. They gave a brief outline of the proposed project which was to put a High Ropes course in possibly The Dell to engage youth and others.

The project had received funding of £5,000 for a feasibility study which is now being carried out and the plan is for a public display of the results on the Market Square on 30<sup>th</sup> May, 2009. The document will be available to the Committee, Council and others.

### **Litter**

A resident of Wymondley Road complained about the litter which she described as horrendous mainly on Pinehill Field where there are only one or two bins and not regularly collected. There was also signs of drinking. The resident suggested perhaps a schools programme. Also mentioned Windmill Hill which requires a regular clean up suggested Community Service perhaps.

Inspector Simon Tabert who was present said that young people use areas mentioned to escape adults and the police had recently sabotaged an event which had youngsters planning to camp out on the field mentioned.

The resident would have a conversation with the Police after the Town Talk. The field is owned by Herts County Council and it was said that talks should be with County as to the acceptable use of the land.

Councillor Allison Ashley added that Windmill Hill is cleaned twice a day at 9.30am and 4.30pm.

**Action – To speak to Herts. County Council re the land in question**

## **Churchgate**

An attendee on behalf of Churchgate Retailers stated that refurbishment of Churchgate is a priority and said that Hammersmatch should be having regular talks with the project team at North Herts. District Council and if not why not?

Judi stated that there was an Information Note in front of the Committee meeting later and this would be discussed then.

## **Police**

Inspector Simon Tabert introduced Sgt. Karen Dixon who has joined the Neighbourhood Team and informed Town Talk that there were now 5 Ward Constables as opposed to 3 previously.

He stated that Hitchin crime figures showed a slight increase but an improved detection rate, one of the biggest in Herts. There has been a reduction in shoplifting and burglary to homes had decreased.

A questioner asked about the increased activity of the police helicopter recently and Simon replied that the helicopter was sent up for a number of reasons and it was there to protect the public.

## **Church Parking/Pedestrianisation**

It was raised the issue of Church parking on a Sunday and the proposal before the Hitchin Area Committee, later, regarding a TRO for the Market Place on a Sunday. It was said that Hitchin Area Committee cannot wait for an accident to happen. Sundays were now used differently by residents than 10 to 20 years ago. Shops are open on a Sunday and more people go out in the town and use the Market Place similar to a Saturday, with young children running about not expecting to avoid cars parking there.

There are three different issues here.  
Church parking  
Proposal for High Street being closed on a Sunday  
TRO for no parking on a Sunday in Market Place

The Church Warden for St Mary's Church informed Town Talk that the congregation at St Mary's was growing and they could have 350 in the Church and these have to park somewhere. There are two services one at 9.30am and 11.15am and the older people attending Church require access via the High Street.

Discussion took place about the gate and that access for people with disabilities could still be available as on a Saturday.

## **Town Talk**

Judi reminded everybody that this was the last programmed Town Talk of the Civic year and there would not be another one until June, unless local organisations get together to arrange one perhaps in May. She offered help and support to any organisations wishing to do this and the CDO was available to take notes of the meeting.

## **Updates from previous Town Talks**

### **Homeless Provision**

A positive meeting had taken place on the above issue which has started the conversation about provision for the homeless people during the day. Partnership working to move this forward continues.

### **Nuns Close**

As is the case with all works affecting a street, all residents and businesses residing in the affected area were consulted and the notice was advertised in the newspaper for the temporary closure. Letters went to residents and businesses in Nun's Close on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2008.

Road works signs to warn the public that as an 'experimental closure' the section of the road will be closed from.... and that the public should consult the design office with any queries.

During the six month experimental closure, public notices will be maintained on site so that those with concerns regarding the closure can make their views known.

