

Town Talk Notes– Tuesday 28th July 2009 – 6.15 pm – 7.15pm @ Christchurch Hall, Bedford Road, Hitchin.

The Chair, Councillor Judi Billing, welcomed everybody to the Town Talk. She also welcomed PC Jackie Hickman, PC Lee Jessup, Natalie, Hitchin Town Centre Ranger and Judy and Nicky from The Sanctuary. The next Town Talk, before a Hitchin Area Committee meeting, will be on Tuesday 22nd September, 2009 at Westmill Community Centre, Hitchin.

Issues raised by members of the public present

Town Hall/Museum

Safety of pedestrians on pavements from cyclists and A boards

Road Signs blocked by trees/tree excrescence

Update on provision for cyclists

Road markings

Road Signs/Trees

It was mentioned that at the junction of Wellingham Avenue and Bedford Road there are branches covering the sign and it was asked whether there was a regular maintenance of cutting back branches.

There are a number of areas of Hitchin where overgrown trees are blocking signs and the police also advised that CCTV cameras are being blocked by overgrown branches.

County Councillor Derrick Ashley advised that Highways are responsible for a number of trees in the area and they are currently behind schedule with their tree maintenance programme

It was requested that residents note particular problem areas and present this information to either the Committee or the District Council.

Councillor David Billing also has asked about a maintenance contract and it was requested that information on this be obtained from the North Herts District Council Arboriculturist.

ACTION – Information from North Herts District Council re their maintenance contract for trees.

Action Update - The process for overhanging vegetation is as follows:

If a report is received about overhanging vegetation it will be inspected. If it's a highway tree causing the problem an order will be placed to have the tree pruned back. If it is a private tree we will pass on the details to HCC who will contact the owner to have the tree pruned back.

Routine inspections also often pick up problems of overhanging trees and these are treated as above.

It was also requested that the Council are to be congratulated on the work they have been and are doing on replacement trees and grass cutting.

ACTION – To place a compliment on the Council's 3 C's. (Comments, Compliments and Complaints)

Pedestrian Safety

The number of A boards on Hermitage Road was raised and how a person who is blind has difficulty when there are sometimes two boards right in the middle of the pavement. It was suggested that this is something the Town Centre Rangers could assist with and talk to the businesses concerned.

It was also asked if there is a licensing process for A boards and if so who is responsible for monitoring the compliance of the licensing.

ACTION - Information regarding this to be requested

Action Update – The issue of A boards is currently the responsibility of Herts County Council under Section 115 of the Highways Act.

It was also raised that young cyclists on Market Day are using the space outside Marks and Spencer and W H Smith during the school holidays. The police said that this an offence and an on the spot fine can be given if they witness it.

It was also said that even responsible cyclists have to go on the pavement at times due to the large number of HGV lorries using the roads. What is required is cycle provision.

The Hitchin Transport Urban Plan, which is currently being reviewed, should have substantial provision for cyclists. It was also mentioned that the scrap metal lorries are continuing.

Cambridge was mentioned as cycle friendly and worth a visit to see how it copes with cyclists and traffic.

Road Markings – It was said that the road markings on Hitchin Hill made traffic veer in to the centre. Councillor Derrick Ashley said that this was to stop traffic cutting corners and the markings were similar to that in Oughton Way and Old Park Road. These traffic features will be safety audited 6 months after implementation. It was noted that since the markings have been installed there have been no incidents and drivers are taking more care.

Police – The Police reported that crime in the Town Centre is down and shoplifting that is taking place is being detected through a successful partnership between the Town Centre Rangers and the Police.

ROTW was fully policed and a very successful event with no major issues.

There were arrests within the town.

It was agreed that a Town Centre Ranger in attendance at future Town Talks would be appreciated and beneficial.

Town Hall/Museum – Concerns were raised about losing the Town Hall as a venue. It was also said that recommendations had gone to Cabinet regarding alternative options and that there was no officer time available to investigate these options. Councillor Sangha said that he had been told that other options have not yet been ruled out.

Hitchin Town Centre Initiative had re expressed its interest and officers need to explore this as a transfer of assets as recommended by Central Government.

Councillor Richard Thake said irrespective of what has gone before the fact of the matter is that government funding cuts have been indicated and could put the whole issue back in the melting pot.

Councillor Clark said that neglect of the Town Hall has gone on for a long time and it would benefit the town if the Hall was put into public ownership.

Councillor Sangha said that there needed to be a good structured feasibility study and appropriate partners involved who can offer options and it was important to keep pressing the issue.

The facilities working group were meeting on Thursday 30th August at the Town Hall.

Churchgate

Churchgate was briefly discussed and it was advised that this item was on the agenda for the Hitchin Area Committee meeting following this meeting.