

Hitchin Town Talk Notes – Tuesday 13th September 2011
6.30 pm – 7.15pm at Westmill Community Centre, John Barker Place,
Hitchin,SG5 2PG

The Chair, Councillor Judi Billing, welcomed everybody to the Town Talk.

The next Town Talk will take place on Tuesday 15th November, 2011 at Hitchin Boys School, Grammar School Walk, Hitchin, SG5 1JB - 6.30pm – 7.15pm.

Issues raised

- Riverside Walk
- Churchgate/Simons Developers
- Post Office Site
- Increased charges for community facilities

Riverside Walk

The question was raised about the Sainsbury advertising banners on the railings between the car park and the flats. It is thought that this may be Sainsbury land and they can use the railing for advertising. This will be investigated. It was also asked if this needs licensing consent and Cllr Bernard Lovewell, Housing and Environmental Health Portfolio Holder, will raise this with a Licensing Officer.

Update - The banners do require advertisement consent and Sainsburys will be contacted to either remove them or submit an application.

Churchgate/Simons Developers

It was asked if the Councillors had read the English Heritage Report and the Chair replied yes. She continued that the Council had suggested to English Heritage that it would be more effective to talk when there was a scheme to consider but English Heritage were unable to accommodate this suggestion. The Council is looking in detail at the Report and will be responding to English Heritage in due course. Officers have also offered to meet with them and hope to have further discussions with them in the coming months as the scheme evolves.

Councillor David Billing added that the English Heritage Report would be a useful contribution to the concept scheme and the final scheme when it is ready for planning permission.

Simons are working hard in consulting with all parties to develop something that is more acceptable to the population. Councillor Paul Clark added that there are no plans for Churchgate on the table at the moment, and that English Heritage commented on a concept. The Bishop's Stortford scheme is further on in the process.

A questioner raised other Simons developments and in particular Witney and had Councillors seen this for themselves and suggested a visit.

Councillor Lovewell said he had relatives in Witney and they were generally positive about the scheme and people were now shopping in Witney rather than Oxford.

Concerns were raised over Simons finances and the questioner asked which of the Companies registered by Simons had the Contract been signed with. The questioner was asked to email the concerns to Cllr Judi Billing.

A resident added that the English Heritage report says very important things about Hitchin and should be noted and any scheme that comes forward has got to reflect Hitchin.

Post Office Site

A resident raised the action on the last Town Talk notes and that he mis-understood the reply but he was now satisfied. It was up to the Post Office site owner to prepare a brief prior to planning permission was now. It was said that that this identified the importance of neighbourhood plans and at the November meeting information re the fuller process would be available.

Update – The Local Development Framework was on the agenda at the Cabinet meeting on 27th September, 2011, and the response of NHDC to the Consultation on the National Planning Policy Framework. All these documents are on available on the NHDC website.

Increased charges for Community facilities

It was raised that the price to rent community facilities had gone up dramatically particularly in case of Hitchin Town Hall. He continued that a review was to come in June or July re the impact. As Plinston Hall is going to close for 2years he felt this will have an impact on the community facilities.

John Robinson, NHDC Strategic Director of Customer Services, said that there was data available and that this showed Hitchin Town Hall hire by regular groups had remained stable. Two major hirers had left with one new one and the return of the one that had left meant that there are still 18 regular hirers. On private bookings, the data was not able to disentangle those not booking because of the future closure of the hall from those not booking because of the increased hire charges. Bookings can reserve halls for 1 – 2 years in advance. He confirmed that the income target was broadly on target.

He also said that Plinston Hall is fundamentally different from other community facilities but that the Head of Policy & Community Development would be asked to consider the possible impact on community facilities with the closure of Pilnston.

A question was raised regarding Westmill Community Centre and the Council having to repair the roof as there is uncertainty over the proposed re development. The need for the hall this hall remains. It may be that North Herts Homes would replace the Hall but it would be a much smaller scheme that was first on the table perhaps just one floor instead of the proposed two. The roof will be repaired.

The Chair added that the Town Talk Notes were **notes** and not Minutes. This was an informal meeting and the notes were used only to show what had been discussed and any actions from issues discussed.