

TITLE OF REPORT: CHAMPION NEWS

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURAL SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise the Committee of the activities and schemes with which the Community Development Officer has been involved during the past month.
- 1.2 To bring to the Committee's attention some important community based activities that will be taking place during the next few months.

2. FORWARD PLAN

- 2.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key decision and has not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

3. PROJECT/ACTIVITY/SCHEME DETAILS

- 3.1 **The Voice of Hitchin Youth** – to celebrate the end of the school year, The Voice are holding a 'gig' night with local bands at Club 85 on Thursday 24th July, 2008, from 7.45pm until 11.00 pm.
- 3.2 **Triangle Community Garden Open Day** – the Triangle Community Garden Open Day will take place on Sunday 29th June, 2008 2pm – 5pm. There will be plant stalls Asian food, nature trails, art and craft and many other activities.
- 3.3 **North Herts Big F.A.B Event** – in partnership with Herts County Council's 'Wellbeing for Over Fifties' project group, the 50+ Community Development Officer is coordinating the largest event aimed at people between 55 and 70 the district has seen so far. This project is being seen as a pilot by HCC who are looking to roll out similar events county wide.

On Saturday June 14th 2008, at the Spirella Building in Letchworth, people from across the district will be invited to attend a community engagement exercise called 'Talking about My Generation'. At the same time the Big F.A.B. (Fifty and above) Event will take the form of an information fair with a free prize draw, health checks, complimentary therapies and stalls provided by local community groups and organisations. There will also be tours of the Spirella Building.

Using the information gained from the community engagement process the 'F.A.B. Development Plan – 2009 - 2012' will be drawn up to look at what activities and services will be required by the new generation of retired people in North Herts.

To be involved in the event or for more information contact Claire Morgan, 50+ Development Officer on 01462 474226.

- 3.4 **Hitchin Counselling Service** - Hitchin Counselling Service have sent their Annual Report and Accounts for 2007, copies of which are available. They say that thanks to the Hitchin Area Committee Grant the Counselling Service was able to continue its work with an increase in the number of counsellors giving their time to the service and with a 20% increase in the number of clients receiving counselling compared to the previous year.
- 3.5 **Hitchin Town Hall** - notwithstanding the disappointing outcome of the Community Assets Fund application, further discussions on the future of the Town Hall are being carried out through the partnership between the Council and the Town Centre Initiative. In this, as the Council is a pilot project in the Advancing Assets for Communities – Demonstration Programme, free advice and guidance is being offered by the Development Trust Association (DTA). A progress report on the current position of the Town Hall is being prepared for the Cabinet meeting on 24th June 2008, and copies of this will be made available to Members and public at the earliest opportunity.
- 3.6 **Hitchin Allotments** - waiting lists are still on the increase, particularly at Ransoms and Pirton Road, which are in excess of 2 years with little indication of changeovers in the near future. These waiting lists are now closed to new applicants until the situation improves.

Burford Way – possibility of voluntary works from a local church group. Concrete posts have been removed and a new gate in chainlink has been installed. Quotes have been asked for a new water standpipe and to gravel the pedestrian entrance.

Old Hale Way - the Buzzworks project has had positive reporting in The Comet and Anglia News. Unfortunately the project has experienced some theft and vandalism. Fence repairs have been ordered and quotes asked for removal of rubbish and create extra parking. A water tap has been replaced and water leak repaired.

Pirton Road – Top up of gravel on roadway has been completed and a tap replaced. Repairs to timber standpipes have been ordered and quotes asked for an extra standpipe and tap.

Ransoms – Quotes have been asked for replacing fencing and gates and constructing a pathway. Replacement of all timber standpipes have been ordered.

- 3.7 **Triangle CPZ Exhibitions** - the exhibition of the proposed CPZ for the Triangle Area will be in Holy Saviour Church Hall, Radcliffe Road, Hitchin, on Thursday 5th June, 2008 from 12.30pm – 4pm and Saturday 7th June from 10am- 3pm.
- 3.8 **School Surgeries** - a verbal report on the school surgeries which took place on Monday 19th, Tuesday 20th and Wednesday 21st May, 2008, will be given at the meeting.
- 3.9 **Town Talk** - Notes and any actions arising from the last Town Talk, held on Tuesday 18th March, 2008, are attached as Appendix A.
- 3.10 **Hitchin Market** – Hitchin Town Centre Initiative are the preferred bidder and the process of clarifying terms and conditions is taking place. The current commencement date is the 1st of July 2008, dependant on the terms and conditions being resolved.
- 3.11 **Task and Finish Group Recommendations Update** - attached as Appendix B.

- 3.12 **Hitchin Forum Litter Report** – Hitchin Forum has provided a document regarding arrangements in various locations in Hitchin. The Grounds Maintenance and Street Cleansing Teams are investigating the identified locations and taking responsive action to deal with any problems where appropriate.

However, where there is a concern about property owned by others such as Railtrack and utility companies it is proving difficult to improve the situation. Work is ongoing at present.

It should be noted a number of locations identified within the document are outside the remit of the District Council and is therefore the responsibility of either other land owners or organisations to address their own responsibilities as landowners and/or in accordance with the responsibilities placed on them in the Environmental Protection Act.

- 3.13 **Rhythms of the World** – the festival takes place on 12th and 13th July, 2008. The organisers have requested the use of Butts Close for parking and a letter has been sent to The Cow Commoners.
- 3.14 **Brampton Park Road/Balmoral Road** – a meeting has been arranged on Thursday 22nd May, 2008, at Hitchin Rugby Club at 7.30 pm, for residents to discuss whether to form a Resident's Association or perhaps a Neighbourhood Watch. A verbal report of that meeting will be given at this meeting.
- 3.15 **Soundbase Under 18's Music Venue** – a meeting has been arranged with agencies and supporters to discuss the present position and the future of the Under 18's Music Venue. This will take place at Soundbase Studios, 21 Bancroft on Thursday 29th May at 10am. A verbal report of that meeting will be given to this meeting.
- 3.16 **Windmill Hill** – a meeting has been arranged with Groundwork and their Landscape Architect, North Herts District Council Service Manager Grounds Maintenance and Parks and Open Spaces Officer to discuss improvements to Windmill Hill. These discussions will also take note of the recent Environmental Audit by the Police. The meeting is taking place on site on Monday 19th May, 2008. A verbal report will be given at this meeting.
- 3.17 **Highways Issues** – the Committee is asked to endorse the following additional Highways proposals to be added to the list previously given to the Joint Member Panel.
1. Pedestrian phase at Cadwell Lane traffic lights
 2. Woolgrove Road vehicle activated 'slow down' sign near St Faiths Close where a number of frail people live.
 3. Pedestrian crossing in Purwell Lane at Mill Lane, where children cross who use Mill Lane as a short cut from Mary Exton School.
 4. Old Hale Way, pedestrian crossing near Our Lady's school
- 3.18 **Walsworth Festival** – the Festival took place on Sunday 18th May, 2008, and a lovely sunny day brought the crowds to this community festival. The small band of volunteers, who put this festival on every year, would welcome new members.
- 3.19 **Service Level Agreements** - A review of the Council's Policies and Procedures for Financial Assistance to the Voluntary and Community Sector is currently underway, with a report scheduled to go to Cabinet in the near future. This review includes the arrangements for Service Level Agreements as well as the general grants that are awarded by Area Committees.

- 3.20 **Dates** – Monday 9th June 2008 – Hitchin Festival Box Office opens
Sunday 15th June, 2008 – Historic Town Tour – Guided Walk 2pm
Friday 20th – Sunday 22nd June 2008 – Continental Market, Market Place
Tuesday 20th June, 2008, Farmers Market
Saturday 28th June, 2008 – Hitchin Festival begins

4. RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1 That the Committee endorses the actions taken by the Community Development Officer to promote greater community capacity and well-being.

5. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 To ensure that the Committee are kept informed of the work of the Community Development Officer.

6. APPENDICES

- 6.1 Appendix A – Town Talk Notes 18th March 2008.
6.2 Appendix B – Task and Finish Group Recommendations (to follow).

7. CONTACT OFFICER

- 7.1 Margaret Bracey, Community Development Officer. Ext: 4830.
Email. margaret.bracey@north-herts.gov.uk.

APPENDIX A



Town Talk Notes– Tuesday 18th March 2008 – 6.15 pm – 7.15pm @ Christ Church Hall, Bedford Road Hitchin.

The Chairman, Councillor Judi Billing, welcomed everybody to the Town Talk and said that this would be last Town Talk of this Civic Year and that the next Town Talk would be on 3rd June, 2008, venue to be advised..

There was two additions to the Town Talk notes from the meeting on Tuesday 15th January, 2008.

Under 'Lack of Response to Councillor Surgeries'

'A further report will be taken to the Committee in June on an improved system to ensure that valuable customer feedback is received and acted upon appropriately in the agreed timescales.'

Under 'Freedom of Information Act – Council Interpretation'

A written statement and information will be available at the Town Talk meeting on 3rd June, 2008

Items to be discussed

Sunday Car Boot
Police Report

Issues Raised by members of the public present

Public Transport
Arcade Toilets
Graffiti
Parking

Sunday Car Boot

The Reverend Michael Roden requested that the Sunday car boot be relocated because it was affecting the life of St Mary's Church as the they were timetabled against each other. This was causing social tension as Sunday trading was increasing, chocking church life.

APPENDIX A

The Church has 4 to 5 services on a Sunday with 350 – 700 of a congregation and growing with 240 at the main service. With a significant number of elderly members car parking was essential and there has been an immediate 25% economic impact which may affect keeping the Church open in the week.

The Market Committee is aware of the issue and trying to resolve the problem. There had been lots of discussions with possible solutions. The car boot will go on until the end of May and then will depend on the operator after that date. No consultation took place before the car boot started.

The Council are being asked to look at it again in terms of location. The Town Centre Manager suggested that the Lairage Car park could be open to shoppers every Sunday and that the bottom of Portmill Lane car park be exclusively reserved for Church members.

Parking

Residents perception of the decriminalisation of parking was positive during the hours of 9am – 5pm Monday – Saturday. It was well policed and well enforced. But on evenings and weekends there was zero enforcement and it was a parking free for all. Signage was inadequate regarding the restrictions and there was a lack of clarity regarding pavement parking, whether parking attendants can enforce or the police.

The resident asked for three actions.

1. Signs and Lines: the Council must bring signs and lines up to the required standards so that there is clarity about the restrictions that apply and, as a result Penalty Charge Notices once issued can be upheld.
2. Enforcement: the Council needs to have some enforcement activity even low levels covering evenings and weekends.
3. Council and Police: there needs to be clarity about which body is responsible for pavement parking and whichever body is responsible needs to focus some effort on enforcement, including at evenings and weekends.

Councillor Judi Billing advised that there was a Parking Report on the agenda for the Committee later that evening.

Arcade Toilets

A resident said that there was discrimination against women with regard the Arcade toilets. The men have access to all 5 cubicles and the women to 3 but the men have exclusive use of 2 and the women have none.

It was suggested that one of the unisex toilets should have women only.

Councillor Judi Billing confirmed she was happy to take this back to see if this could be done.

Graffiti

The resident said that there appeared to be an increase of graffiti in the town, particularly in Walsworth and Bearton Wards. He mentioned a number of sites.

APPENDIX A

Inspector Julie Wheatley said that the police had identified a syndicate who are being dealt with and there are plans for reparative justice for the young people to clean it up.

They had also been taking photographs of the graffiti to enable them to identify tags.

There is a graffiti hotline for members of the public to report graffiti. **01462 474338**

Public Transport

A resident said that there appears to be cut backs in evening public transport when in fact we should be increasing public transport.

Councillor David Billing said that this was a political decision when North Herts District Council decided not to subsidise the contracted bus services.

Councillor Bernard Lovewell said that he was a great advocate of buses but unfortunately people weren't using them in the evening and companies won't run a commercial service or Council subsidise empty buses with the increased demands on taxpayers money.

The question was asked is there a record of how many people use free passes? Yes there is a way to record people using free buses.

There is a commitment to look at innovative ways to provide public transport such as smaller buses.

It was said that in Peterborough they had traffic counsellors visiting people in their homes to discuss their travel plans. This apparently increased the usage of public transport.

It was also raised that visiting Stevenage Hospital in the evening can be difficult as the last bus leaves before the end of visiting hours.

It was suggested that in the new Civic Year that bus companies be asked to come to Hitchin Area Committee.

Police

Inspector Julie Wheatley announced that all crime had reduced by 10% in Hitchin. There has been a big impact on violent crime which may be due to operations. Robbery was up marginally and some of this was attributed to ROTW.

On going work was being done with reference to the young people on Windmill Hill and more sustainable funding for youth diversionary activities was being sought. Lighting and litter bins had been identified as improvements from the Audit that took place and this would be discussed at the Joint Action Group meeting in April.

Inspector Wheatley then went on to advise of the priorities identified by the locality and Neighbourhood panels and that every effort would be made to resolve these issues, working together with other agencies.