

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

HITCHIN COMMITTEE

**Meeting held at Roman Catholic Church Hall, Nightingale Road, Hitchin,
on 7 March 2006 at 7.30 p.m.**

MINUTES

PRESENT: *Councillors; Judi Billing (Chairman), Derek Sheard (Vice-Chairman)
Alison Ashley, David Billing, Paul Clark, Joan Kirby, Lawrence Oliver,
Deepak Sangha, Martin Stears, R.A.C. Thake and Sarah Wren.*

IN ATTENDANCE: *Head of Finance, Chief Engineer, Parks and Countryside
Development Manager, Principal Planning Officer, Community
Development Officer and Senior Committee & Member Services
Officer.*

121. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting, a warm welcome to the speaker at Agenda Item 7 – Planning applications and the speakers at Agenda Item 5 – Public Participation (Church House and Triangle Festival 2006).

122. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sandra Lunn and R. Shakespeare-Smith.

123. MINUTES – 24 January 2006

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2006 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

124. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS – THE CLOSURE OF PAVILIONS IN NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE

The Chairman announced that there would be an additional item of other business and that this concerned the proposal to close pavilions in Hitchin and elsewhere in North Herts. She had agreed to accept this item as urgent business which could not wait until the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee as the proposed closures would take effect at 1 April 2006. The item would be considered at the conclusion of the debate on Wheeled Sports Provision – Walsworth Common, Hitchin (see Minute 129 below).

125. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Members made the following Personal Declarations of Interest in respect of Agenda Item 7 – Planning Applications:

Councillor Deepak Sangha – Application 06/00127/1: Land at 26 Common Rise, Hitchin - interest in a property elsewhere in Common Rise.

Councillor R.A.C. Thake - Application 06/00127/1: Land at 26 Common Rise, Hitchin - interest in a property elsewhere in Common Rise.

Councillor Joan Kirby – Application 06/00069/1: 41-87 Milestone Road, Hitchin – member of the Board of North Hertfordshire Homes.

126. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: CHURCH HOUSE, CHURCHYARD, HITCHIN

The Reverend Boden thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee concerning proposals for the refurbishment and development of Church House, Hitchin, a building used as a community facility.

The Reverend Boden circulated a briefing paper to Members of the Committee which provided some background to Church House, details of its usage, and the plans for its refurbishment. The trustees of Church House had funds in the region of £60,000, which were used for maintenance, but were inadequate for major refurbishment. St. Mary's Church itself was in the midst of a £300,000 fabric appeal and was thus not in a position to help.

The Reverend Boden advised that there were two ideas for refurbishing the building. Plan A was modest, well advanced and quickly achievable, and Plan B was more exciting and would involve a rebuild which would enhance not only the interior of church House, but also an important public space in Hitchin. For both plans, the trustees wished to register an interest in Section 106 monies that may arise from the Churchgate development.

The Reverend Boden explained that Plan A would enhance the current premises by providing a disabled toilet and parent and baby room; a new kitchen with easy access to the hall through a hatch; a larger side meeting room for communal use; a wider, lighter, corridor; and a permanent ramp into the car park. Plan B would involve imitating the style of Nos. 24-28 Church Yard, whilst having a similar ground floor arrangement to Plan A, a similar 'wrap around' flat arrangement on the first floor and then four or five flats on the second floor with dormer windows. The benefits of Plan B would be to substantially enhance a plain corner of Hitchin; increase the housing stock; and assist in paying for the venture.

The Committee was supportive of the proposals, but could give no guarantee about the future use of any Section 106 monies. The Reverend Boden confirmed that the cost of Plan A was estimated at £200,000, whilst Plan B was estimated at £2.5Million.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the information provided in the presentation be noted;
- (2) That officers be requested to further investigate possible funding sources to assist in the future development of Church House.

127. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: THE TRIANGLE FESTIVAL 2006

Mr K. Harriet, Mr T. Parmar, Mr J. Turner and Ms C. Halcombe, the representatives from the Hitchin Triangle Festival Committee thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee concerning proposals for the 2006 Triangle Festival.

The representatives advised the Committee that the first Triangle Festival had been held in 1981, but that the event had not been held since 1999. It was hoped to resurrect the event by holding it on the weekend of 1st/2nd July 2006 at Ransomes Recreation Ground. It would be a multi-cultural event, which would comprise music, cultural stalls, food stalls and bars.

The representatives from the Festival Committee stated that they required funding of £10,000 for the event to go ahead, and asked the Hitchin Committee for a grant for this amount. However, it may be possible for the event to be reduced to one day's duration, in which case a lesser level of funding would be required.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the information provided in the presentation be noted;
- (2) That the proposal to resurrect the Triangle Festival be supported in principle, but that consideration to the request for funding be given later in the meeting as part of the debate on the Champion News item (see Minute 134 below).

128. WALSWORTH COMMON SKATEPARK - UPDATE

The Parks and Countryside Manager (PCM) provided an update on the progress with a proposal for a skatepark at Walsworth Common and confirmed that a local user group had met with a specialist manufacturing company and had prepared the design for a skateboard facility as presented at Appendix A. The Committee noted that this design offered activities for the experienced skateboarder and novice and would be constructed from heavy gauge steel. The PCM referred the Committee to Appendix B which indicated the preferred site after various locations had been inspected and advised that the site had good pedestrian access, was not near properties and was partly screened by shrubs.

The Committee noted that consultation had taken place with NHDC officers, Hertfordshire Constabulary and The Voice of Hitchin Youth; a public display had been held at the Community Centre on 2 December 2005. In addition, written comments included: Good design, must have a flat bank, should be locked at night, inappropriate

location, excessive cost, Walsworth should remain a green space, noise to local residents.

The Committee was supportive of the proposals, but asked the PCM to ensure that the skatepark did not become an isolated facility in Walsworth Common by providing a proper access path.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the information provided in the report be noted;
- (2) That the design and location of the skatepark be agreed;
- (3) That once installed the facility be monitored by the Community Safety Team and the NHDC Crime Prevention Officer and, if required, the NHDC Property Services Manager be asked to make available portable/temporary CCTV;
- (4) That the involvement of the User Group in the design of the scheme be welcomed, and a vote of thanks be conveyed to the Group for its work.

REASON FOR DECISIONS:

To meet the Council's strategic objectives and to implement the work programme of the Council's Play Area and Outdoor Youth Provision Strategy.

129. THE CLOSURE OF PAVILIONS IN NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE

The Chairman advised the Committee that the additional item of business concerned the proposed 2006-2007 savings item SP 18 'close the remaining pavilions within the District as they are of poor quality and are heavily vandalised', which had been presented to the Hitchin Committee on 13 December 2005. There had been insufficient opportunity to receive precise details of the reasons for the closure of certain pavilions and possibly put forward counter proposals.

Members expressed concern at the budgetary process which had been adopted for closure of the pavilions, and hoped that Cabinet, in conjunction with the Hitchin Committee, would investigate imaginative ways of retaining the pavilion facilities throughout the interim period between the proposed closures and future capital improvement works (some of which were not planned until 2010). Members considered that it would be unacceptable for local football teams to be without changing facilities for this length of time, and that this could threaten the existence of a number of teams, as the some local leagues insisted on teams having proper changing facilities. The Committee commented that the level of saving (£27,500) was not particularly excessive in terms of the overall budget, and that Cabinet could perhaps identify this saving from elsewhere.

RESOLVED: That the information in the report be noted.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

- (1) That Cabinet note the Hitchin Committee's unhappiness at the budgetary process adopted for closure of the pavilions, in that the precise details of the pavilions earmarked for closure did not form part of the budget proposals report considered by the Committee on 13 December 2005;
- (2) That Cabinet note the Hitchin Committee's unhappiness at the proposed closure of the pavilions;
- (3) That Cabinet, in conjunction with the Hitchin Committee, investigate imaginative ways of retaining the pavilion facilities throughout the interim period between the proposed closures and future capital improvement works;
- (4) That, in any event, Cabinet be requested to consider taking no action on the pavilion closures until the end of the current football season.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To ensure that the Council meets its strategic objective of promoting first class leisure and cultural facilities to contribute to healthy living for all our citizens.

130. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

RESOLVED to determine the planning applications as set out in the report of the Planning Control and Conservation Manager and as indicated in the following schedule:

Reference Number	SCHEDULE	
	Description of Development and Location	Decision
06/00127/1	Land at 26 Common Rise, Hitchin SG4 0HN Rear conservatory.	Conditional Permission (as report)
06/00069/1	Land at 41-87 Milestone Road, Hitchin SG5 Demolition of existing dwellings numbers 41 to 87 Milestone Road, Hitchin prior to residential re-development.	Conditional Permission (see (a) below)

(a) That with regard to planning application reference 06/00069/1 that permission be **GRANTED** as per the recommendations set out in the report of the Planning Control and Conservation Manager with the following additional conditions:

(1) All parking and vehicle movements associated with the demolition of existing dwellings on this site shall be provided on land which is not public highway and the use of such areas must not interfere with the use of public highway.

Reason: In the interest of highway safety during demolition of existing buildings.

(2) Notwithstanding the requirements of condition 3 the period of demolition work hereby granted permission shall not exceed 13 weeks from the date of commencement.

Reason: To keep to a minimum the period of noise and disturbance affecting this residential area.

131. ENFORCEMENT ITEM

Reference Number	Description of Development and Location	Decision
05/00119/1 ENF	Lavender Barn, Lucas Lane, Hitchin SG5 2JB Breach of conditions regarding landscape scheme.	Enforcement Action Agreed

RESOLVED: That the Planning Control and Conservation Manager, subject to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services being satisfied with the evidence be authorised to initiate appropriate enforcement action to secure compliance with Conditions 4 and 5 of planning permission 03/00625/1.

132. PLANNING APPEALS

The Principal Planning Officer confirmed that 1 appeal had been lodged since the meeting of this Committee held on 24 January 2006.

Appellant	Ms L. Phillips
Address	26 Purwell Lane, Hitchin.
Description	Link-detached 2 bedroom house with 1 parking space and vehicular access off Benchley Hill, Hitchin Ref. O5/01866/1
Procedure	Written representations.

The Principal Planning Officer confirmed that 2 appeals had been determined since the meeting of this Committee held on 24 January 2006.

Appellant Michael Shanly Homes
Address 15-19 Old Hale Way, Hitchin.
Description 4 four bedroom semi-detached and 8 three bedroom terrace dwellings with associated parking, access and landscaping
Ref. 05/01268/1
Decision Appeal DISMISSED on 15/2/06.
Committee/ Committee
Delegated

Appellant Nelgus Holdings
Address 37-38 Queen Street, Hitchin.
Description Use of land for the open display of cars for sale following demolition of cottages
Ref. 05/01011/1
Decision Appeal DISMISSED on 24/2/06.
Committee/ Delegated
Delegated

133. CAR PARK CHARGES IN NORTH HERTS

The Chief Engineer presented a report which enabled the Hitchin Committee to comment on the proposed increases in car park charges approved by Council on 9 February 2006 as one of the savings items in the Budget estimates for 2006/07. Appendix A to the report outlined the proposals for the new parking tariffs.

Members acknowledged that the parking tariffs had not been increased for five years, and felt that, although the percentage increase (40%) was large, in real terms this only equated to a 20p increase in stays of up to 2 hours. In addition, the minimum length of stay had been increased from up to 30 minutes to 1 hour.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the information in the report be noted.
- (2) That Cabinet be advised that the Hitchin Committee is supportive of the proposed increase in Council Car Park charges for the 2006/07 Financial Year.

REASON FOR DECISIONS:

To allow the Hitchin Committee make and pass comments on the proposed parking tariffs to Cabinet.

134. CHAMPION NEWS

The Community Development Officer (CDO) provided an update on the projects, activity and schemes since the last meeting of the Committee on 24 January 2006. The CDO confirmed that a report on plans for Butts Close from the Countryside Management Service would be presented at a future meeting of the Hitchin Committee. The Committee noted that the 'Voice of Hitchin Youth' would be at Market place on 4 March 2006 to promote their web site and explain their role.

The CDO referred the Committee to Paragraph 3.8 of her report which indicated five themes that the North Herts Highways Partnership – Joint Member Panel would use as a basis for the funding of specific projects and schemes from the 2006-2007 JMP Discretionary budget. Members were requested to advise the CDO or the Hitchin Committee Administrator by e-mail of schemes and projects for consideration by the JMP.

The CDO tabled an additional paper in respect of whether or not the Committee wished to cover the costs of hanging baskets, pyramid planters and window boxes in the town centre, as these items had been removed as a savings option from the Grounds Maintenance Budget.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the information provided by the Community Development Officer on activities since the last meeting of the Hitchin Committee held on 24 January 2006 be noted;

- (2) That the Community Development Officer be requested to:
 - (i) report back to the April meeting having obtained from the organisers of the Triangle Festival 2006 some detailed costings as to how the budget for the event will be utilised, on the basis that the Committee is minded to part fund the proposed Triangle Festival 2006;
 - (ii) report back to the April meeting with some more detailed information on which hanging baskets require funding for 2006/07;
- (3) That the feasibility of the installation of a further access ramp at the bottom of Windmill Hill be considered as a project by Hitchin Visioning for utilisation of any capital funding available;
- (4) That the North Hertfordshire Highways Partnership – Joint Member Panel be advised that the Hitchin Committee considers that the following schemes be financed from the Panel's 2006/07 Discretionary Budget under the theme of "Speed of traffic and road calming measures":-
 - (i) Speed reduction measures along the whole length of Old Hale Way;
 - (ii) Bedford Road – Vehicle Activated Sign;
 - (iii) St. Michael's Road – Vehicle Activated Sign;
 - (iv) Cadwell Lane Traffic Lights – improved pedestrian facilities;
 - (v) Stevenage Road (Stevenage bound carriageway) – Vehicle Activated Sign;
 - (vi) A new pedestrian crossing on Bedford Road (near its junction with Elmside Walk and across to Waitrose).

REASON FOR DECISIONS:

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

135. GRANTS TO VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT BUDGET 2005/2006

The Community Development Officer (CDO) presented a report on the Committee's Grants, Development, Discretionary and Visioning Budgets 2005/06.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the expenditure, allocations, and balance of the current 2005-06 Development budget, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be noted;
- (2) That the new allocation arrangements for the 2006-07 Development budget to come into effect on 1 April 2006, as detailed in paragraphs 3.1 to 3.6 of the report, be approved;
- (3) That the renewal of the following Service Level Agreements be agreed, at the levels stated:
 - (i) Apni Duniya - £250 plus inflation uplift over the past three years;
 - (ii) Hitchin Festival - £2,000 plus inflation uplift over the past three years;
 - (iii) Hitchin Senior Citizens - £4,000 plus inflation uplift over the past three years;
- (4) That the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee consult with the Chairman of Hitchin Visioning with regard to possible projects that could be funded from the capital allocation of the Area Visioning Programme;
- (5) That an award of £1,000 be made as a contribution towards the costs associated with the Vaisakhi Festival procession in respect of highway safety, insurance and effective traffic management on Saturday 15 April 2006, and that this sum be taken from the 2006/2007 Central Area Grants budget;

- (6) That the Cabinet Members on the Committee report back on the reasons why the Service Level Agreement with the Hitchin Town Centre Initiative was for the duration of only one year.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To advise the Hitchin Committee of funds remaining for disbursement in the year 2005/2006.

136. HITCHIN TOWN CENTRE MANAGER

The Hitchin Town Centre Manager gave an oral update on recent activities, including the fact that Hitchin had been awarded "Fair Trade" status (the first town in Hertfordshire to have received the award); the 2006 Hitchin Festival would be comprising 42 events over a four week period; there had been a recent audit of street furniture; Marsh UK Ltd. would shortly be re-locating from Bancroft to elsewhere in the country (loss of 200 jobs); EEDA funding had been received for heritage signposts across the town; and residents' complaints about pigeons in the town centre.

The Town Centre Manager reported that the project for use of Hitchin Town Hall as a community engagement centre was not proceeding. The District Council would be unable to come forward with the required capital monies by 31 March 2006, and so the EEDA funding had been lost. The District Council was required to undertake a Needs Analysis and carry out market testing for other potential uses of the Town Hall, both of which would take some time.

The Committee was extremely concerned to hear this news, and questioned why the requirement for a Needs Analysis and market testing had not been identified earlier in the process. The Committee expressed its support to the Chairman in any efforts she would be making in attempting to rescue the scheme.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the information provided by the Hitchin Town Centre Manager be noted;
- (2) That officers report back to the next meeting on the feasibility of installing rising bollards in place of the gate at the junction of High Street and Brand Street;
- (3) That the Chairman of the Committee be supported in her efforts to rescue the Hitchin Town Centre Initiative's project for the use of Hitchin Town Hall Community Engagement facility.

The meeting closed at 9.25p.m.

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Chairman