

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

HITCHIN COMMITTEE

**Meeting held at Hitchin Town Hall, Brand Street, Hitchin,
on 27 September 2005 at 7.30 p.m.**

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

IN ATTENDANCE: *Head of Leisure Services, Head of Planning Services and Building
Control, Head of Financial Services, Projects Manager - Planning
Services, Principal Planning Officer, Senior Planning Officer,
Community Development Officer and Committee Administrator.*

53. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

- (1) The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked those who had attended the Town Talk.
- (2) The Chairman thanked all those who had attended the meeting on 21 September 2005.
- (3) The Chairman welcomed the representatives of the Fair Trade Towns Group who would make a presentation at Agenda Item 6.
- (4) The Chairman confirmed that at Agenda Item 8 – Planning Applications the following applications had been withdrawn:
05/01117/1-319 Bedford Road, Hitchin
05/01137/1 – North Herts College, Willian Road, Hitchin.

54. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: Allison Ashley and Sandra Lunn.

55. MINUTES – 16 August 2005

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 August 2005 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

56. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was tabled.

57. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Agenda Item 12 – Grant application, Hitchin Christian Centre.
Councillor Sarah Wren declared a personal interest in that she attended the Hitchin Christian Centre but took no part in the administration of the Centre and confirmed that she would remain for the item and speak and vote.

58. PRESENTATION OF A PETITION – CHURCHGATE RETAILERS ASSOCIATION

RESOLVED: That the receipt of the petition signed by 23 petitioners 'We the undersigned retailers of the Churchgate Association, are strongly against Option A – Redevelopment and for urgent refurbishment of our shopping centre' be agreed.

59. PRESENTATION – HITCHIN A FAIR TRADE TOWN

Councillor Martin Stears introduced this item and reminded Members that North Hertfordshire District Council had resolved at its meeting held on 26 April 2005 (Minute 118 refers) that Hitchin should become a Fairtrade Town.

The representatives for the Hitchin Fairtrade Group thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and provided a brief description of World Trade and Fair Trade. The speaker advised that Fairtrade objectives were not only to achieve a fair price for producers but also, to improve working conditions and pay for many exploited workers throughout the world.

The Committee noted that 131 towns in the United Kingdom had achieved Fair Trade status. Currently 32 towns had made an application but unfortunately there were none in Hertfordshire. The speaker confirmed that Fairtrade was good for business and that the availability of Fairtrade goods in Hitchin and North Herts was improving steadily. Many local churches were using Fairtrade products and this authority had also agreed to use Fairtrade tea and coffee at its main premises in Letchworth Garden City.

Several suggestions were made, including: The production of a Fairtrade directory listing all those in Hitchin who used and sold Fairtrade products and the feasibility of a Committee that would oversee the application for Fairtrade status.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the representatives of the Fair Trade Towns Group be thanked for their presentation.
- (2) That the Hitchin Committee wished every success towards the recognition of Hitchin as a Fair Trade Town and that wherever possible support would be provided.

REASON FOR DECISION

To ensure that the Hitchin Committee are aware of progress in the promotion of Hitchin as a Fair Trade Town.

60. REVISED CHURCHGATE DEVELOPMENT AREA PLANNING BRIEF

The Projects Manager – Planning Services presented the revised Churchgate Development Area Planning Brief following the completion of background work and consideration of comments made during the public consultation period, and that a Table of Proposed Amendments was presented at Appendix 1. Options for the provision of additional car parking at St. Mary's Square and Portmill Lane East were also provided at Appendix 1. For further clarification the proposed amendments were shown in the revised Brief with track changes at Appendix 2. The Committee noted that a separate document incorporating a summary of public comments was available in the Member's Room.

The Projects Manager confirmed that c180 responses were received during the public consultation, with the majority of comments applicable to the two development options. Responses were also received on car parking proposals, the Market, Retail Development and Churchgate site, Access, servicing and pedestrian movement, and funding/viability and implementation of the development scheme.

The Committee noted that a numeric assessment of those in favour of each option were fairly balanced, however, a more detailed appraisal of the comments and associated benefits/disbenefits confirmed that that Option A – Redevelopment had clearly more benefits. There had been substantial support for the market to remain in its current location and it was recommended that the market should be kept as part of any scheme that would also incorporate the River Hiz and the Churchgate Centre. It would also be impracticable to separate the market until an overall design scheme for the Churchgate and market sites had been submitted and the implementation of the scheme had been agreed. The Committee noted that in practical terms the re-provision of the market must tie in with groundworks and River Hiz walkway improvements. With the opening up of the River Hiz walkway and the requirements of the River Hiz Development Guidelines the size of the market would be reduced and it was recommended that the market area should not be less than 70 per cent of the current linear footage of market stalls.

The Committee, led by the Chairman discussed both Options and agreed that Option A – Redevelopment should be included as the preferred option in the revised Development Brief and recommended to Cabinet.

With the potential loss of car parking provision due to the redevelopment of Biggin Lane considerable work had taken place in providing replacement spaces and the outcome was to put forward two Options for consideration: Option 1 – Two levels of parking at St. Mary's Square and Portmill Lane East with an undercroft car park below at river level. Option 1 would have a net 99 car parking spaces. Option 2 – Two levels of car parking at St. Mary's Square with an undercroft at river level, and at Portmill

Lane East would be enhanced and upgraded to allow for future development e.g. Extension of the undercroft parking as at Option 1. Option 2 would have a net 37 car parking spaces. The Committee were pleased to note that both options could allow for the parking of market trader's vehicles, with the necessity of providing a balance between needs of customers and market traders. Although there would be some impact on views across to St. Mary's Church, the positive result would be the enhancement of views along the River Hiz by widening the walkway and removal of vehicles parked up against the walkway at Portmill Lane East.

The Committee, led by the Chairman discussed both Options and agreed that both Option 1 and Option 2 required further work and discussion and that it would not be appropriate to make a decision at this meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report be noted;
- (2) That officers be requested to present the Implementation Plan at the meeting of the Hitchin Committee held on 24 January 2006.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET

- (1) That Option A – Redevelopment of Churchgate be taken forward as the preferred option for the Revised Churchgate Development Area Planning Brief and all necessary amendments be made to the Brief as presented at Appendix 2 and then adopted as the Council's statement of policy;
- (2) That the area of the Market should not be less than 70 per cent of the linear footage of stalls of the current market and adopted as part of the revised Churchgate Development Area Planning Brief;
- (3) That Paragraph 6.9 of the revised Churchgate Development Area Planning Brief be amended to add "Regular consultation with appropriate stakeholders be arranged to ensure the continuity and improvement of the Market and must be seen as an integral part of the construction process";
- (4) That the approach as set out in Paragraph 5 to the report with regard to increased car parking at St. Mary's Square and Portmill Lane East be supported, and that further consideration and a decision on the preferred option should be made following adoption of the Revised Churchgate Development Area Planning Brief;
- (5) That all the suggested amendments to the revised Churchgate Development Area Planning Brief listed at Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 be agreed and adopted;
- (6) That following adoption of the revised Churchgate Development Area Planning Brief officers be requested to prepare an Implementation Plan in liaison with Members and Key Stakeholders;
- (7) That the Implementation Plan must include clear arrangements for the continuity of operation and parallel improvement of the Market, which would include the creative use of streets, spaces and paths during and possibly after construction, which might involve the agreement of amendments to the Master Plan.

REASON FOR DECISIONS

To pursue the strategic objectives of North Hertfordshire District Council which included the improvement of the Churchgate Area of Hitchin Town Centre as the revised Churchgate Area Development Planning Brief had been one of the key projects that came from the Hitchin Town Centre Strategy.

61. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The Committee heard oral presentations as follows:

Application Ref. 05/00911/1 – Former petrol station, Wratten Road West, Hitchin, SG5 2EF

Mr G. Simpson spoke as the applicant.

Application Ref. 05/01054 – Land rear of 33 Wymondley Road, Hitchin, SG4
Mr D. Jones spoke as a representative of objectors.

Mr Ides spoke as the applicant's representative.

RESOLVED to determine the planning applications as set out in the report of the Head of Planning Services and Building Control and as indicated in the following schedule:

Reference Number	SCHEDULE Description of Development and Location	Decision
05/01117/1	319, Bedford Road, Hitchin, SG5 2UU Erection of 4 two bedroom flats, 3 three bedroom and 2 four bedroom terraced houses, 2 four bedroom semi-detached houses, 17 parking spaces and one double garage. New vehicular and pedestrian access off Bedford Road. Demolition of existing dwelling.	Withdrawn
05/00911/1	Former petrol station, Wratten Road West, Hitchin. SG5 2EF Three storey building to provide 7 two bedroom flats and alterations to access (as amplified by drawing nos. 806/v1/a and 806/v3/a and daylight and sunlight assessment received on 14 July 2005 and amended by drawing nos. L1216/20 Rev. b, L1216/21 Rev. B, L1216/22 Rev. B and L1216/23 Rev. B received on 19 August 2005).	Conditional Permission (as per report)
05/01054/1	Land to rear of 33 Wymondley Road, Hitchin SG4 Outline Application for detached dwelling, two parking spaces and associated landscaping (Design & External Appearance Reserved – as amended by plan no. 01C received 10 August 2005).	Refused (as per report)
05/01137/1	Land at North Herts College, Willian Road, Hitchin, SG4 0UJ Outline Application for 71 dwellings (60 one and two bedroom flats/maisonettes and 11 three bedroom houses), 97 parking spaces, alterations to existing vehicular access off Willian Road (design, external appearance and landscaping details reserved) following demolition of existing buildings. (As amended by revised site layout drawing No. 15469/1013B received on 23 August 2005).	Withdrawn from the agenda

62. PLANNING APPEALS

The Principal Planning Officer confirmed that no appeals had been lodged since the meeting of this Committee held on 16 August 2005.

The Principal Planning Officer confirmed that one appeal had been determined since the meeting of this Committee held on 16 August 2005.

Appellant	Prime Residential Ltd.
Address	319, Bedford Road, Hitchin, SG5 2UU
Description	Construction of eleven dwellings following demolition of existing dwelling. Ref. 05/00011/1
Decision	Appeal ALLOWED on 26 September 2005.

63. TRAFFIC REGULATION ORDER REVIEW – MEMBER CONSULTATION

The Chairman introduced this item on behalf of the Chief Engineer. The Committee noted that within Section 4 of the NHDC Car Parking Strategy which had been adopted by Council at its meeting held on 27 July 2004 (Minute 29 refers), there was a requirement to review On Street Parking including 'review and amend where necessary existing on street waiting restrictions'.

This review would require an extensive consultation process with affected parties, the general public and Ward Members and would benefit from extensive local knowledge. One of the reasons for this review was that waiting restrictions had been unchanged in parts of the District for many years, during which time traffic patterns and some road layouts had changed. The Committee noted that it might be possible to amend restrictions and provide additional On Street parking of varying duration, and in some cases it might be possible to introduce a restriction of some type where there was none previously. This would increase the turnover of roadside spaces and improve the economic and environmental viability of some areas.

The Committee noted examples of locations in Hitchin where waiting restriction issues had been identified and were under consideration e.g. Hollow Lane, Tilehouse Street, Bancroft and various town centre sites, and covered: possible changes of unrestricted sections, residents parking, consolidation of existing restrictions to standard 'at any time', possible extension to lengths of limited waiting and existing 8.00 to midnight to full 'at any time'.

Accordingly the Chairman invited Hitchin Members to submit views and suggestions on waiting restrictions before Christmas 2005 and that all views and comments would be analysed and consolidated in a report to this Committee in the summer of 2006.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the information concerning current and possible changes to waiting restrictions in Hitchin be noted;
- (2) That Members of the Hitchin Committee be requested to present their views and observations on the review of street waiting restrictions to the Chief Engineer no later than Friday 16 December 2005.
- (3) That the Chief Engineer be requested to provide each Hitchin Councillor with a complete list of Traffic Regulation Orders applicable to their Ward as soon as possible.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

To allow all views and observations be incorporated into the Traffic Regulation Order Review, as required in the adopted Parking Strategy.

64. CHAMPION NEWS

The Community Development Officer (CDO) provided an update on the following activities and projects since the meeting held on 16 August 2005: Voice of Hitchin Youth – Meetings had been held on 6 and 20 September 2005 and future meetings will take place fortnightly and a good feedback had been received on under 18 evenings at local venues; Westmill Community Association – The 40th anniversary celebrations had been a great success on 2, 3 and 4 September; Mill Media – The next publication will be distributed before Christmas 2005 and will invite comments as to the contribution and benefit to the Community of Mill Media; Westmill Community: Young People – a meeting is scheduled for 11 October 2005 where youth workers, volunteers, Police Community Support Officers, North Herts Homes and local schools would be invited to seek the views of young people followed by a consultation evening on 1 November 2005.

The CDO provided answers to two items raised at Hitchin Town Talk on 12 July 2005. Recycling facilities in Hitchin were part of an ongoing large review of recycling throughout North Herts and consultation would take place on future arrangements. The CDO confirmed that the receipt on the conclusion of the Housing Stock Transfer was £48.4M. Of this £27.8M had been 'set aside' under government regulations leaving a balance of £20.6M as a useable receipt for capital projects. This sum had been enhanced by £8.4m from right to buy under the housing stock transfer agreement. This reserve fund had been placed on deposit and interest was used to

help reduce the Council's tax levy. The Committee noted that this authority had spent or earmarked £22.8M of its capital reserves towards its housing capital programme for the period 2003/2004 to 2008/2009.

RESOLVED: That the information provided on activities undertaken by the Community Development Officer be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION

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

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

RESOLVED: That the 2005/2006 funds in the Visioning Budget of £5,380, the Central Development Budget of (£1,119) and the total Ward Development Discretionary Budget of £11,120 be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION:

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

66. GRANT APPLICATION – HITCHIN CAMERA CLUB

RESOLVED:

- (1) That a grant of £500 be awarded to Hitchin Camera Club as a contribution towards the cost of a Dell 2300MP Digital Projector which will be used to attract new members and assist existing members to move into digital photography and by local Explorer Scouts working towards the Duke of Edinburgh Award – Photography.
- (2) That the grant be allocated from the Central Area Budget.

REASON FOR DECISION

To ensure the continued support of the Hitchin Committee to the voluntary sector.

67. GRANT APPLICATION – HITCHIN CHRISTIAN CENTRE

- (1) That a grant of £619 be awarded to Hitchin Christian Centre as a contribution towards the costs of kitchen refurbishment at its Bedford Road, Hitchin centre which in turn will support 'By your side' organised for the Senior citizens in the community;
- (2) That the grant be allocated from the Central Area Budget.

REASON FOR DECISION

To ensure the continued support of the Hitchin Committee to the voluntary sector.

68. GRANT APPLICATION – HITCHIN TOWN CENTRE INITIATIVE – ROAD CLOSURE
REASON FOR DECISION

RESOLVED: That a decision on an award be **DEFERRED** to allow the Head of Community and Cultural Services present a separate detailed report on the proposed road closure with detailed costs to the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee to be held on 8 November 2005.

REASON FOR DECISION

To allow the Hitchin Committee make a decision on receipt of additional information.

69. HITCHIN TOWN CENTRE MANAGER

The Town Centre Manager advised the Committee of the major disruption caused by the road works in Brand Street during the weekend of 24/25 September 2005. The business community suffered great inconvenience as commercial vehicles, buses and coaches as well as private cars were routed through Market Square during peak trading. This also required the lifting of the High Street Barrier to allow the passage of diverted traffic when this shopping area is designated as a traffic free zone on a Saturday. The Town Centre Manager strongly expressed dissatisfaction with Hertfordshire Highways because of a lack of information and consultation regarding the road works. Members had received many complaints and the Committee agreed that the Director of Hertfordshire Highways should be made aware of the concerns of the Hitchin Committee and the business community. In addition it was very difficult for the Town Centre Initiative to access public transport information and that the cancellation of the Arriva service 8 would cause many problems, notably for citizens who needed to attend Lister Hospital in Stevenage.

Members for the Highbury Ward also expressed concern on the current traffic management works underway in Highbury Road and it was considered appropriate that the Director of Hertfordshire Highways should be requested to provide more details on the works programme in Highbury Road.

The Chairman proposed and the Committee agreed that an invitation be extended to the Director and the North Herts District Manager of Hertfordshire Highways to the next meeting of the Hitchin Committee on 8 November 2005.

The Town Centre Manager wished to advise the Committee that Rotary and Round Table in Hitchin provided grants and that voluntary organisations should perhaps approach these groups as well as Hitchin Committee for funding.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the information provided by the Hitchin Town Centre Manager be noted;
- (2) That the concerns raised by the Hitchin Town Centre Manager and endorsed by the Hitchin Committee on the recent road closures in Hitchin, and traffic management in Highbury road be forwarded to the Director of Hertfordshire Highways, and that an invitation be extended to Hertfordshire Highways to the next meeting to be held on 8 November 2005.

The meeting closed at 9.32 p.m.

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Chairman