

Hitchin Town Talk Notes – Tuesday 6th March 2018

6.30pm – 7.15pm ~ Westmill Community Centre

PLEASE NOTE

- If you wish to report an issue to NHDC you do not need to wait until the next Town Talk meeting. Compliments, Complaints and Issues can reported anytime to NHDC Customer Services via the NHDC Website or call 01462 474000
- You may also report issues to your local ward Councillor (contact details are on the NHDC website)

The Vice Chair, Councillor Ian Albert, welcomed everybody to the Town Talk
The next Town Talk will take place on Tuesday 5th June 2018 at 6.30pm at Westmill Community Centre.

Present -

- Cllr Ian Albert (Chair)
- Cllr Bernard Lovewell
- Cllr Martin Stears-Handscomb
- HCC Derek Ashley
- Cllr Elizabeth Dennis
- Cllr Richard Thake
- Cllr Judi Billing
- Claire Morgan – Communities Officer

Apologies: Cllr Nicola Harris, Mr Chris Parker

Issues raised this session

1.	Brown Bin Charges	-	Colin Dunham
2.	Speeding Cars	-	Colin Dunham
3.	Community Facilities	-	Margaret Eddleston
4.	NHDC Customer Service Centre	-	Brian Foreman
5.	Planning Process	-	Brian Foreman
6.	Churchgate	-	Robin Dartington

1. **Payment for Brown Bin Charges**

CD wished to complain about the lack of contact information contained in the leaflet posted to all residents in North Herts. The document only had the internet as a means of contacting the Authority. This is discriminating against people who do not have access to a computer and gives them no means to find out information on how to pay or to find out further information. CD asked what about those people who do not have bank accounts and need to pay cash or by post office order? Also many people may not be able to afford to pay a lump sum and might prefer to pay in instalments and has there been any thought as to how this could work?

CD had paid for this service by cheque and received a receipt. But it has not been advertised that this payment method is available to people.

CD asked if this information could be publicised via the local press the Comet and Royston Crow?

Action: Waste team and Communications to look at more details information in local press.

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2. Speeding Cars

CD explained that the Police's safer neighbourhood newsletter was asking for volunteers to join the PCC's Drive Safe Scheme. CD wondered whether Local Councillors would be volunteering to help with the scheme.

Cllr JB stated that there were many roles in the local community that required volunteers to assist. She outlined all the duties she had undertaken just today in her role as both a County Councillor and District Councillor and most of the other Councillors are involved as volunteers with many local groups and organisations.

3. Community Facilities

ME pointed out that in the NHDC Community Halls Strategy (2012) stated that the amount of Community Facilities in Hitchin town centre were adequate and that the former Bancroft Hall was no longer needed.

The Grant and Community Update report being presented at this evening's Committee Meeting reported that funding was being considered to assist a former Scout Hut to be brought back into use as a community facility in that area.

ME wished to know if this decision constituted a 'U' turn by officers.

If the grant for the refurbishment of the Former Scout Hut on Bancroft is agreed this would not constitute a U turn of the decision to remove Bancroft Hall.

As Bancroft Hall was demolished some years ago it would not be possible to change that decision.

The former scout hut on the grounds of the Hitchin Boys School was not included in the strategy of 2011 as; a) officers were unaware of its existence and b) it is not an NHDC owned facility.

4. NHDC Customer Service Centre

BF explained that he had been trying every day last week to contact NHDC by telephone to make a payment for his garden waste. He could not get through to anyone who was able to assist him and there was either no answer or he was transferred to someone else who could not assist. This morning (6/03/18) he visited the Council Offices and there is one small reception desk with one member of staff and a very long queue of people.

BF feels that the process in the Council Offices reception is not working. More staff are needed to greet people at reception and deal with their enquiries.

More staff are needed to answer the telephones

BF attempted to use the payment machine in the reception area and the printer that should produce a receipt both of these machines were slow and inadequate.

He also mentioned that those people who wished to pay by cash could not use the machine and the receptionist had to handwrite a receipt which held up the process even further.

BF did state that the staff were very friendly and helpful but the process just doesn't work very well and should be looked at.

Cllr JB did point out that the NHDC reception had only just moved back into the newly refurbished building therefore it had only been in operation for one day.

She also wished to point out that there have been several comments made by members of the public on some of the Hitchin Face Book sites that NHDC had wasted public money on refurbishment of the Council Offices. Cllr JB wanted to clarify that the refurbishment mainly benefits the employees of NHDC and that as an employer NHDC have a duty of care to staff and wish to make their working environment safe, comfortable and a pleasant place to work.

ACTION: Report to CSC Manager

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5 Planning Process

BF explained that one of the Planning Officers had not picked up that a planning application for a Chalet Bungalow was in fact a two storey house. He asked whether it was right that a public report published by the Council should have mistakes including mentioning a road that does not exist. BF has submitted a stage 1 complaint on this issue.

6 Churchgate

RD asked that as NHDC will be negotiating with a company with regard to working in partnership on the Churchgate project how can the local community have their opinions heard at this stage?

Cllr RT explained that it was far too early in the process to comment on the plans as so far there aren't any.

Officers are currently negotiating as to whether or not there is a business case to put forward and looking at the overall feasibility of a scheme.

Both Cllrs and the local community and stakeholders will have to wait until there is something to consult on.

Cllr IA expressed his disappointment that officers had obviously been in some form of communication with partners for 20 months before the Councillors were informed.

He asked that there should be more transparency between officers and cllrs and between the Cabinet and full council.

Cllr M S-H stated that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee made it clear that full consultation must happen with stakeholders.

Cllr JB explained that she was both furious and optimistic. She was cross not to be informed as a member of the Churchgate Board.

However, she was optimistic that what is being propped presently does take into account the view of the public when they were last consulted with.

She explained that representatives from Hitchin Markets Ltd were to be presenting at the Area Committee meeting following Hitchin Councillors concerns regarding NHDC taking back the management of the Market.

7. AOB

Cllr IA asked whether 6.30pm was a good time for the Town Talk and whether it should be held separately to the area committee meeting.

BF said that he felt more people attended when the meeting was in a more central location.

Meeting Closed at 7.15pm