

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 Chair, Councillor Ian Albert, welcomed everybody to the Town Talk

Present-

- Cllr Ian Albert – Chair
- Cllr Martin Stears-Handscomb
- Cllr Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg
- Cllr Keith Hoskins
- Cllr Paul Clark
- Cllr Sam Collins
- Cllr Kay Tart
- Cllr Val Bryant
- Claire Morgan (notes)

Apologies: Cllr Judi Billing and Cllr Simon Harwood

Issued raised this session

- | | | |
|---|---|--------------------------|
| 1. Infringement of Green Belt | - | Chris Parker |
| 2. Hitchin Swim Centre | - | Bernard Eddleston |
| 3. Pavements | - | Brendan Lee |
| 4. Litter on A602 | - | Ellie Clark |
| 5. Local Plan, Churchgate | - | Robin Dartington |
| 6. Hitchin Museum | - | John Skeels |
| 7. Disabled Toilet in Hitchin Arcade | - | Colin Dunham |

Infringement of Green Belt - CP referred to the Wyevale Garden Centre Site on Hitchin Road. There are two telephone masts in the grounds of the Garden Centre that were camouflaged as large conifer trees. Over the years the fake conifer leaves have been damaged in the weather and the masts are now clearly visible. CP informed us that he understood the Garden Centre site has been sold. He was also concerned that the Hitchin Caravan Centre at the rear of the Garden Centre has expanded the area it is using for caravan sales which is an infringement of the green belt.

Cllr Kay Tart stated that she will investigate. CP suggested she speak to Chris Braybrook in the Planning Department.

(Community Engagement officers have liaised with colleagues in NHDC Planning who have confirmed that they are aware of this infringement and the matter is being dealt with)

CP also made reference to a piece of land between Old Hale Way and Ickleford and wanted to know whether this is going to be a Garden Centre?

Hitchin Swim Centre – Car parking BE asked that as the plans to expand the car parking for the Hitchin Swim Centre had fallen through, why are the £500k funds still allocated to the project in the Council's budgets?

Cllr IA responded that the amount is remaining in there to address Swim Centre parking options in the light of the Planning Inspector decision. Users of the Swim Centre are being encouraged to use the Lairage Multi-storey car park as overflow parking.

BE stated that the capital budget of £500k should be completely reallocated for other things and suggested that the refurbishment of Charnwood-The Old Hitchin Museum might be a good use for some of it.

Cllr IA has pressed for an early decision on this so that capital money could be reallocated to other projects".

Pavements: BL explained that during times of moderate rain fall the pavements in the town centre particularly along Portmill Lane and at the corner of Hermitage Road have deep puddles forming.

Cllr KH explained that the issue has been reported to County Council. The area had undergone works on services underground and the contractors didn't do an adequate job of re-paving the area following the works.

The issues on the corner of Hermitage Road are due to guttering being blocked. Cllr KH said that he would contact the landlord who owns those properties.

Cllr PC added that there was also an issue in the High Street where the grills in the drains had collapsed. The ward members covering the town centre were dealing with the issue.

Bid for Future High Street funding – RD informed the group that he'd been in contact with the home office regarding the Future high street fund.

Cllr KH explained that there is no timetable from Central Government on when we are likely to hear back regarding the NHDC bid to the Future High Street Fund. Members and officers are looking at other sources of funding. He explained that we're hoping to be informed within the next month as Central Government said it will be announced prior to the parliament summer break. NHDC have allocated £130k towards the project.

Local Plan – RD explained that the draft local plan has unrealistic plans for the area around Paynes Park and Churchgate which outlines extra square footage provided for retail.

It's widely accepted that the town centre does not need extra space for retail units. The plan for extra retail was not removed when the plan was modified.

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It was explained that the Local Plan is currently with the planning inspector. Therefore nothing can be altered at the moment.

Once the Local Plan has been agreed and adopted then other necessary adaptations may be able to be made.

There maybe funding available from Europe (if applied for prior to October)

David Ashton then asked: What influence will the council's adoption of the motion to accept a 'climate change emergency' will have on the Local Plan? Cllr PC explained that within the Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) will include items such as solar panels on new builds utilising wind power and bring in developers who will make new builds more energy efficient.

Cllr SC mentioned electric car charging points. He would also like to see every building in North Herts meeting the highest green standards possible.

Annie Sander asked whether the local plan only covered housing.

Cllr PC explained that it also covered Industrial areas, Roads, Infrastructure, Parking, Transport as well as housing

Litter on the A602 EC – Explained that she understood the authority only had budget to clean the verges on the A602 once a year. It is usually done in March, but this year it wasn't done until May. However, it is already a mess again (just a month later) There is also fly tipping in that area which has been reported to Environmental protection.

As the road is coned off when the litter is collected by contractors would it be helpful if EC could organise volunteers to help?

She has lots of volunteers who would be happy to lend a hand.

Cllr LD-H explained that there was no wish to put volunteers at risk but suggested the idea could be raised with officers in waste as there may be a way of partnership working with the 'Clean Up Hitchin' volunteers.

In terms of the fly tipping issue there may be funding available from the police crime commissioner to put up large signs to warn people not to fly tip.

Cllr SC said that he thought that the large signs were funded by Police and Herts County Council. He said he would like to see a big anti-littering campaign.

Cllr MS-H liked the idea of working in partnership with Ellie Clark and Rachel Campbell from 'Clean Up Hitchin'.

It was announced that the North Herts Museum would be opened officially on 6th July at 10.15am.

Disabled Toilets in Hitchin Arcade CD – Explained that the Disabled Toilet in the Arcade has been out of order due to a Health & Safety issue for weeks.

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He has contacted officers and has been informed that it's closed for Health and Safety reasons. He asked officers whether a sign could be put up to let people know where the nearest alternative disabled toilets are in town. This has not been done.

CD had received a letter from officers dated 4th June which gave no indication what was being done to rectify the issue and when this would be carried out. ACTION: Cllr SC agreed to follow this up with the relevant NHDC officers.

Margaret Eddleston reported that the Council made £1.9 million from car park charges. She wanted to know what this money would be used for. Cllr PC agreed to ask the relevant service director where this money is and what it can be spent on. Suggestion from the floor was to reduce the parking charges.

Gregg Napp asked about the pedestrian access between North Herts College (corner of St Michaels Road) and Hitchin Railway Station. Cllr KH explained that he has been working on a project to improve access to the London bound platform and for Network Rail to open that side up to enable direct access to the platform. Network Rail own a lot of land along the side of St Michaels Road which could provide the required access. In partnership with HCC Cllr Judi Billing the county council has funded consultants to look at the Network Rail land to identify how they could utilise the area to gain access. He went on to explain that the consultant's report should be ready within 6 weeks and he will then meet with HCC Cllrs, Network Rail representatives and Bim Afolami MP for Hitchin and Harpenden.

Brendan Lee asked whether the pathway down from St Michaels / Benslow Bridge could be opened?

Nicky Clark asked whether in light of the adopted climate change strategy could NHDC revisit the planning application for the Cement Factory in Langley?

Cllr SC explained that he'd been informed by Planners that as permission had been agreed there was no further action that could be taken. He is concerned about the air quality being affected by the Lorries that will be serving the site. Cllrs VB and PC stated that they sat on the planning committee but were not supportive of this plan.

Cllr PC explained that the 3 other towns in North Herts each have a 5 ton limit on vehicles in the town. However Hitchin doesn't at present. He would like HCC to implement the same conditions on traffic coming into Hitchin which could prevent movements to and from the Concrete facility.

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Cllr IA suggested that perhaps the next Town Talk could be themed to cover environmental issues. This could culminate in concerns being brought for discussion to the Hitchin Committee.

Meeting Ended at 7.20pm