

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 Clare Billing, welcomed everybody to the Town Talk

Present-

- Cllr Clare Billing – Chair
- Cllr Bernard Lovewell
- Cllr Simon Harwood
- Cllr Martin Stears-Handscomb
- Cllr Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg
- Cllr Paul Clark
- Cllr Sam Collins
- County Cllr Derrick Ashley
- Claire Morgan (notes)

Issued raised this session

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|--|---|-------------------------|
| 1. St John's Play area | - | Monica Corcoran |
| 2. Churchgate | - | Chris Parker |
| 3. Local Plan | - | Robin Dartington |
| 4. Hitchin Museum | - | John |
| 5. Parking for residents on St Johns Path | - | Bev Dockray |

1. St Johns Play Area

MC asked whether the play equipment in St Johns Park was at risk of being removed as in the survey undertaken as part of the council's green space strategy in May 2016 it was stated the park had low usage and given an orange status.

Cllr PC responded that when the survey was carried out officers identified play areas for refurbishment, the orange category means that the play area will not be refurbished and as equipment wears out it will not be replaced.

MC asked if the Council could also examine the access to St Johns Play area.

Cllr PC explained that he will be bringing this up as part of the formal Hitchin Committee meeting as he would like to look the wider issue of parks / play areas in Hitchin.

2. Churchgate

CP asked for information in regard to where NHDC is in regard to Churchgate. He explained that the survey the council undertook was successful and he was aware that the bid submitted to the Local Enterprise Scheme (LEP) for funding to assist with a project to renovate the area was unsuccessful and that the developer the council was working with in partnership had dropped out. However, CP wanted to know what other stakeholders were now involved.

Cllr SH explained that there is a plan. The shopping centre lease is up for sale, NHDC are putting in a bid to the Future High Street Fund. There are a number of plans currently being discussed but NHDC will not be able to know which one is feasible until we know whether the funds are available.

Cllr MSH stated that NHDC are collaborating with the Churchgate Resurgence community group

Robin Dartington (RD) has carried out his own indicative cost viability he suggested that NHDC should spend some of the budget on a cost consultant. Margaret Eddleston asked why the LEP bid was unsuccessful?

Cllr SH explained that it was believed the bid was unsuccessful as Hitchin is perceived as an affluent town and the bid didn't weigh up against other areas of the country that have a higher percentage of need and their schemes provided more job opportunity than the bid for Hitchin did.

3. Local Plan

RD explained that yesterday was supposed to be the last day to comment on the main modifications of the local plan. However the date for consultation seems to have been changed and he wanted to know why this is.

Cllr SC responded that there was something that the planning inspector had not done so the authority was given extra time for the consultation period.

RD said that he had a query regarding the policy on the Main Modifications for site HT11 (Hitchin Town Centre) he wished to know what the time table was for the town centre strategy.

Cllr MSH replied that it's not possible to answer that question as it's not known how long it will take the planning inspector to agree the local plan.

Cllr PC asked if the committee can request a response from Cllr David Levett (executive member for planning) to respond to RD.

Cllr SH said that as far as he recalls the Town Centre Strategies will happen once the local plan is accepted.

RD asked if there were sufficient staff resources to prepare the strategies once the local plan has been accepted. He went on to add that the part of the

Local plan that refers to site HT11 was nonsense as the Churchgate area is not just the shopping centre but it's the whole area surrounding the Church, the policy states that there should be 4,000 sq meters of additional retail space, which is ludicrous. RD asked how to go about changing this policy in the Local Plan.

Cllr PC added that times change and that the Town Centre is no longer just retail therefore RD had a very valid point and the policy should be examined. He encouraged RD to provide his feedback on the Local Plan and make those comments on the Main Modifications. He encouraged all the Councillors to make their comments to reduce the amount of retail space.

RD also pointed out that the plan includes a further 3,000 sq meters of retail space on Paynes Park.

4. Former Hitchin Museum – Charnwood House

Following a long saga the building has now been closed to the public for 5 years. The new North Herts Museum will be fully open from June this year, will the Museum be able to remove the items they currently store there so that it can be returned to community use?

The council should undertake a full condition survey on the building.

The repairs that have been done so far to the masonry are a disgrace.

The covenant placed on the building when it was originally gifted to the Hitchin Urban District Council states that the building should supply a space to be used by the public for educational / museum use.

The Members of the Committee have requested an update on this issue from the relevant officers.

5. Parking for St Johns Path residents.

The residents of St Johns Path currently park either on the St Johns Road or in the parking bays on the Moorhen's Roundabout on the A602. Some residents have found that they sometimes have to park as far away as Gosmore and walk back.

Recently it has been more and more difficult to find space to park as the spaces are used by commuters. Residents have communicated with HCC Cllr Derrick Ashley regarding the need for resident parking permits.

Cllr PC asked planning officers to consider providing more parking space when the properties at Robins Hill was built and was surprised that the scheme was granted planning permission. He will take the matter up with Head of Planning and suggested that perhaps the bottom of Standhill Road could be used for residents parking.

Hitchin Town Talk notes – Tuesday 5th March 2018
18.30 – 19.15 Benslow Music School

Cllr SC explained that he sits on the NHDC parking group and there is no short term fix. If residents' parking is put in place then it will only push the problem to somewhere else.

In conclusion, parking is a very difficult issue. Traffic calming could have included parking to help slow down traffic.

Cllr SC will take the issue to the Parking Group.

RD interjected that the issue needs to have a holistic approach such as car sharing. Also if the pavements were improved it would encourage people to walk more.

Cllr SC said it needs a modal shift to implement schemes such as improved cycle lanes, public transport and improved pavements.

Meeting closed at 19.20