

Hitchin Town Talk

Tuesday 15th June 2021 6pm (via Zoom)

Present:

IA	Cllr Ian Albert
CB	Cllr Clare Billing
JB	Cllr Judi Billing MBE
SC	Cllr Sam Collins
KH	Cllr Keith Hoskins MBE
PC	Cllr Paul Clark
VB	Cllr Val Bryant
SH	Cllr Simon Harwood
MH	Cllr Mike Hughson
RT	Cllr Richard Thake
DA	Cllr Nigel Mason
EDH	Cllr Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg

Apologies:

Cllr Kay Tart

Cllr Ian Albert welcomed everyone into the meeting. He asked residents if there were any topics they would like to raise.

Topics:

- 1) Anni Sander – With regards the High Street Survey that Herts County Council are running. What is the Cllrs stance on this?
- 2) Anni Sander – There is a need for more toilets at Bancroft Park. One toilet isn't enough.
- 3) Shirley Goldsmith – Asking for an update on improvements to the local bus service.

1) High Street Survey by Herts CC

- Cllr Judi Billing reported that she follows it weekly and was happy to see that people wish to continue with the areas that have been pedestrianised at certain times of the day.
- Hitchin had one of the most positive and popular schemes and was glad the town took delicate steps when introducing pedestrianised areas.
- Extremely confident that this will continue after Covid restrictions ease.

- 1 or 2 people have had issues with the pedestrianised areas, but they are in the small minority.
- Cllr Paul Clark agreed with Cllr Judi Billing that the pedestrianised areas had been popular and would also like to see it continue after Covid restrictions ease.
- Businesses in the area who were reluctant at first have now adapted and embraced it. It's now the 'new norm'.
- Cllr Paul Clark wanted to point out that the consultation had been extended to July 11h. This consultation is for extending what is already in place for another (up to) 18 months.
- Aware that disabled parking bays may be affected and is keeping a close eye on this and looking at possible other sites.
- Worth mentioning that there is flexibility in all of this, and it could all go if something happens.
- Cllr Keith Hoskins hopes the consultation extension helps and will give everyone a chance to look at everything as a whole. The time can be used wisely for an in-depth study that benefits the town.
- Aware that Blue Badge holders need to be accommodated and suggested an area is reinstated at West Alley. West Alley was previously an area where blue badge holders could park.
- Cllr Paul Clark raised the point that drainage works need to be closely looked at too as there have been issues with drainage in the past. This may cause delays.
- Consensus that the temporary road closures and pedestrianised areas are a positive thing for the town centre and should continue after Covid restrictions ease.

HIGH STREET RECOVERY

Last year Hertfordshire County Council made changes to high streets for social distancing. They'd like your views on how those changes could support long term high street recovery.

They are collecting constructive feedback via an online survey >>

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/highstreetrecovery>

2) Bancroft Park

- Anni Sander, and other local members of the public, who visit Bancroft Park, think there is a need for more toilets. They feel that one toilet just isn't enough for the amount of people who use the park.
- Bancroft Recreation Ground > <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/bancroft-recreation-ground>
- Anni Sander also wanted to know if the pavilion there could be used? Café, changing area, toilets.
- Cllr Paul Clark agreed that another set of toilets are needed.
- Cllr Judi Billing mentioned that the buildings that are now Hitchin Hackspace were once toilets > <https://hackhitchin.org.uk/>
- A temporary or even permanent café on the Bancroft site would be great.
- Cllr Judi Billing also said that requests for a café have been made a few times over recent years. The building that Hitchin Hackspace now occupy was even being looked at one point.
- Cllr Ian Albert was aware of the issue and echoed that it would be great if there was a café, or something similar, there for people to use. Someone did once approach with the idea of

opening something up, but it didn't come to anything. If someone again did become interested in opening something, then they would love to hear their ideas.

- Anni Sander then asked for clarification on who owned the Pavilion building and were the Lawn Bowling club tenants as they use the Pavilion.
- Cllr Ian Albert confirmed that the Pavilion is an NHDC building and that the Lawn Bowling club do use it.
- Cllr Judi Billing was also able to remind people that there was once a scheme set up by NHDC where surrounding pub toilets were offered up to people using the park to use – This proved unpopular and was scrapped.
- Cllr Ian Albert concluded that it really does come down to finding the funding.

3) Update on improvements to the local bus service.

- Shirley Goldsmith – Asking for an update on improvements to the local bus service.
- Cllr Sam Collins said there are some changes coming to the North Hertfordshire bus service but none of these are taking effect in Hitchin. This includes any Sunday Service.
- Was able to mention about a new Bus Service scheme that would use an APP that would allow people to get picked up but again this isn't likely to be in Hitchin. Rural areas will see an improvement in the service first.
- Cllr Sam Collins also mentioned that there are plans on the horizon with regards the bus service but was unable to mention anything yet. Hopes to have more information for the next meeting that he will be able to share.
- Cllr Judi Billing mentioned that they did have a Sunday bus service running 5 years ago, and despite a huge effort to get people to use it, it failed due to lack of people taking up the service.
- Cllr Paul Clark echoed Cllr Judi Billing's comments – 'It just didn't take off'

Further questions/ points:

NHDC Website

- Some areas of the website still require an update. Incorrect times and dates remain in place for 2021/22 meetings and team contact details need updating adding.

ACTION – Website is being updated. Please make the NHDC team aware of any pages that need updates.

Use of King George V Recreation ground

- Cllr Simon Harwood asked if a Zoom meeting could be set up to invite groups/ people who use the King George's Playing field to hear their ideas and views on a potential new facility for community use. Noted that we should also try and get Andrew Mills and Steve Crowley along if possible.
- It was agreed that a meeting should be set up to gather early ideas and views.

ACTION – Community Engagement Team and Cllr Simon Harwood will set up a meeting.

Future Bids / Funding's:

- Question was asked by Cllr Simon Harwood about is there any new Bids or Funding's that Cllrs could be applying for. Like 'Coming back Stronger'
- Cllr Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg said nothing new yet as it is all pretty vague, but she will make people aware if/when new things start to appear.

Trees on Hermitage Road:

- Cllr Ian Albert asked if there had been any progress on the plans to plant trees along Hermitage Road.
- Cllr Keith Hoskins hopes that things can move forward after the Hertfordshire Count Council survey comes in. They need to know what's under the ground/ pavement/ road. Currently waiting for that survey.

Hitchin Festival:

- Cllr Judi Billing commented that the Cabinet Panel on Community Engagement and Co-operative Development Panel (North Herts Art & Culture) was full of optimism for opening once Covid restriction allow. Was everything on track for the Hitchin Festival – will it be affected by the restrictions being extended?
- Cllr Keith Hoskins was happy to report that the festival will be fine to operate as they had plans in place for any such extension of restrictions.

Tree Roots:

- Cllr Paul Clark highlighted areas that have problems with tree roots coming through the pavements. Highlighted the trees outside Moss's Corner and Osinsky's bar.

Biggin Lane Park:

- Cllr Simon Harwood asked if the park along Biggin Lane could be improved. Suggested asking local schools to be involved.
- Cllr Keith Hoskins said is was an awkward space to work with. Not sure what could be done with it other than what's already there.
- Cllr Judi Billing commented saying it looked quite nice at the moment.

Land opposite The Victoria Pub/ Bancroft Park – Next to the roundabout:

- Anni Sander asked if a Neighbourhood group could use the land as it isn't being used to its full potential as is.
- Cllr Judi Billing and Cllr Keith Hoskins said it is North Herts land, but suggested Hitchin Committee or Initiative funding could be used to make any improvements.

Cllr Ian Albert noted that Hitchin Councillors' surgery was taking place on Saturday 3rd July and encouraged members of the public to watch Hitchin Committee via YouTube at 7:30pm.

Cllr Ian Albert closed the meeting at 6:55pm.

The next Hitchin Town Talk will take place on Tuesday 12 October 2021.

<https://democracy.north-herts.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeed=147>

It is yet to be decided if this will be virtually or physically. If the Town Talk is virtual it will take place at 6pm. If it takes place physically at a Hitchin location it will run from 6.30pm to 7.15pm.

The Town Talk will be followed by Hitchin Committee at 7:30pm.