**Hitchin Town Talk**

**Tuesday 1 December 2020 6pm**

**Present:**

**IA** Cllr Ian Albert

**CB** Cllr Clare Billing

**JB** Cllr Judi Billing

**SC** Cllr Sam Collins

**KH** Cllr Keith Hoskins

**PC**  Cllr Paul Clark

**VB** Cllr Val Bryant

**SH** Cllr Simon Harwood

**MH** Cllr Mike Hughson

**RT** Cllr Richard Thake

**DA** Cllr Derrick Ashley

**EDH** Cllr Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg

**MSH** Cllr Martin Stears-Handscomb

**Apologies:**

Cllr Kay Tart

Cllr David Barnard

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

**Topics:**

1. Bernard Eddleston - Charnwood update
2. Barry Aaron's - tree planting
3. Robin Dartington - housing plan and allocation for UK migrants
4. John Skeeles - flooring in town hall
5. Simon Madison - speeding lorries on Fishponds Road
6. James - planning of tree planting

Charnwood update by Bernard Eddleston

* There is a paper to go to cabinet in December
* Over the past year the Community Association have worked alongside Councillor Keith Hoskins and Peter Lapham at NHDC to gain an understanding of works needed to make the building suitable for community use
* The Community Association have submitted a business plan to the council which has been reviewed.
* Councillor Simon Harwood noted that he is aware that he has not yet managed to set a date for him and cancel a Keith Hoskins to meet with Bernard and apologised for the delay
* Councillor Keith Hoskins said that NHDC are still keen to see the building used for community matters
* Bernard asked if Hitchin committee will discuss Charnwood in depth at their meeting later in the evening
* Councillor Ian Albert responded that NHDC are waiting for the release of the Cabinet Paper
* Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb clarified that the papers are due to be in the public domain later this week

Tree planting update

* Councillor Simon Harwood noted that following the NHDC’s declaration of a Climate Emergency, this administration is keen to undertake an initiative to re-wild Hitchin as a trial which could then potentially be taken District wide.  Councillor Harwood has been liaising with Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust
* Councillor Harwood recommended looking at St. Albans and Brentwood’s re-wilding schemes for reference
* Any rewilding project will need cross-party collaboration and community buy-in

Councillor Paul Clark spoke about St Mary's square and Portmill tree planting:

* these areas will need trees in pots
* NHDC have identified a site for Woodlands and have been researching funding for this
* the largest cost implication of tree planting is the maintenance, we must ensure that we look after newly planted saplings

 Councillor Sam Collins:

* has spoken with Councillor Steve Jarvis and understands that NHDC are committed to planting 10,000 trees in the next year
* Councillor Sam Collins noted that the ground underneath St Mary's car park is not suitable for tree planting, but potted trees could work

Mary Marshall told the meeting that the peace garden at Hitchin Quaker Meeting House has many flowers and trees which could be used as resources for repotting and replanting.

Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb explained that North Herts District Council are working with the Herts-wide sustainability and biodiversity partnership and NHDC is leading on biodiversity

Councillor Val Bryant noted that in Bearton Ward at the Dacre Road play park there is an area that would be perfect for a community orchard but this will need community support

Councillor Judi Billing added that Dacre Road would be a great location for the introduction of a community orchard as it was the community who created the play park initially

Councillor Keith Hoskins noted that NHDC has received an offer of funding to look into the surfacing of Hermitage Road.

Councillor Richard Thake stated that Highways often involve Hertfordshire County Council and any introduction of trees in an urban area will involve a high level of maintenance which may prove difficult financially

Speeding on Fishponds Road update

* Councillor Judi Billing said that the speed and size of traffic continues to be an issue on Fishponds Road and surrounding areas.
* Unfortunately, Fishponds Road was not deemed suitable to be included in the 20mph zone.
* Also, ward Councillors in the area are constantly battling the issue of industrial traffic
* Councillor billing also noted that Graveley has temporary signs about speed which she will speak to councillor Steve Jarvis about
* Councillor Billing added that she corresponds with resident Simon Maddison on a regular basis on these topics, but they are complex, and solutions are not imminent
* Councillor Ian Albert explained that Val Bryant, Judi billing and himself had a good meeting with Grove Road residents recently to discuss how the speeding awareness campaigns can be revived
* Councillor Derek Ashley explained that he has campaigned for speed cameras, but Whitehall has refused to accept that speeding is a safety issue
* Speed cameras will only be introduced where an accident has taken place

 Housing and Local Plan update

* Councillor Paul Clark said that at the local plan is currently being reviewed by the inspector
* Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb added that we must understand that people need homes
* He added that there is a requirement for NHDC to have a 5-year supply of land ready to be developed and if NHDC don't have this land then developers can build where they like so NHDC must have a Local Plan otherwise green belt land will be built on
* Councillor Sam Collins clarified that no one has suggested that we should not have a local plan but perhaps it should be smaller scale
* Councillor Richard Thake noted that all parties collectively struggle to come to terms with unplanned and unsustainable development the local plan has been delayed by the inspector and other political involvement

Hitchin Town Hall flooring

Cllr Keith Hoskins clarified that regarding the flooring of Hitchin town Hall, it is only the surface that will be replaced, and the spring floor underneath will remain

Portmill Lane toilet sign outside M&S

Chris Parker asked: What has happened to the plaque which used to be outside of M&S? It was a Victorian sign marking Hitchin’s history and was removed some time ago because it contained outdated information about Portmill toilets

* Councillor Paul Clark noted that he is speaking with John Charterhouse to ask if another sign can be introduced
* Councillor Keith Hoskins is also having a wider discussion about town centre signage as much of it is now outdated

Councillor Ian Albert noted that Hitchin Councillors’ surgery was taking place on Saturday 5 December and encouraged members of the public to watch Hitchin Committee via YouTube at 7:30pm.

Cllr Ian Albert closed the meeting at 7:06pm.

**The next Hitchin Town Talk will take place on Tuesday 2 March 2021.**

*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.*