**Hitchin Virtual Town Talk via Zoom**

**Tuesday 30 June 2020 6pm-7pm**

**Present:**

**IA Cllr Ian Albert**

**CB Cllr Clare Billing**

**MSH Cllr Martin Stears-Handscomb**

**DA Cllr Derrick Ashley**

**KH Cllr Keith Hoskins**

**EDH Cllr Elizabeth Dennis Harburg**

**MH Cllr Mike Hughson**

**JB Cllr Judi Billing**

**SC Cllr Sam Collins**

**VB Cllr Val Bryant**

**SH Cllr Simon Harwood**

**Apologies:**

**KT Cllr Kay Tart**

Queries emailed in advance:

* Water consumption.
* Common Rise to Walsworth Common pathway in disrepair.
* Sainsbury’s Hitchin breaching agreed delivery times.

Cllr IA introduced himself as the current Chair of Hitchin Committee and welcomed every to the Hitchin Town Talk. Cllr Albert explained that he would take any topics shortly and that any questions which residents thought of throughout the course of the meeting could be written in the chat box. He opened the floor to residents in attendance to raise any topics for discussion.

**Q1: Robin Dartington** - How can we make cycling safer for both cyclists and cars?

**Q2: Bill Sellicks** - Has HCC secured tranche funding to improve cycling infrastructure?

**Q3: Cara Baldwin** – Do NHDC Councillors have anything to add to the Black Lives Matter statement which was recently released?

**Q3: Black Lives Matter**

**Cllr MSH:**

* NHDC strive to be an inclusive council where staff have equal opportunities.
* NHDC are committed to attracting a wider cross section of people through our recruitment processes.
* NHDC are committed to engaging with people from BAME communities. NHDC will do more to listen to and learn from their experiences.

**Cllr SC:** NHDC need to do more to encourage people from a wider range of backgrounds to be involved in Council.

**Cllr JB:**

* We are currently placing more emphasis on engaging with minority ethnic groups.
* We want to encourage people from underrepresented groups to become councillors.
* There is joint motion which will be heard at full County Council encouraging an improved recruitment process for both members and officers.

**Cllr IA** invited Cara to respond.

**Cara Baldwin** said that she is keen to be involved in these commitments and is interested to know how they are implemented.

**Robin Dartington:** Is it possible to make a quick fix to ensure cycle lanes are safe? By extending double yellow lines for example.

**Cllr PC:** The tranche one money has been applied for but NHDC haven’t heard back yet.

**Cllr SC:**

* Officers have been out cycling routes around the town trying to find the safest routes. We are aware of the issues on St Michaels Road and Wymondley Road.
* The administration has put together the ‘Transport Users Forum’. The next meeting will be about cycling. NHDC are keen to hear from residents.

**Cllr DA:**

* There is a big opportunity with the pandemic to create a new culture which puts sustainable modes of transport before cars.
* The first priority is to get Wymondley Road scheme up and running.
* The A600 Bedford Road could also benefit from cycle lane.
* St. Michaels Road cycle lane can be enforced with cameras.
* The Government need to change the culture and put more emphasis on sustainable modes of transport.
* We need to think radically and make it more convenient for cyclists and less for cars.
* It’s up to NHDC colleagues to place an emphasis on cycling at every relevant point in the Local Plan.

**Bill Sellicks:** Tranche one funding of 1.7 million. If NHDC does not get the funding will this be added to permanent budget?

**Cllr DA:** We have put in a bid and I am fairly confident we will get the money.

**Cllr SC:** The purpose of the Transport Users Forum is to bring all sustainable groups such as cycle users together and create sustainable transport ideas so that when HCC receive funding the ideas are already there.

**Cllr PC:**

* NHDC have had cycling plans in place since 1999 which have just sat on the shelf.
* There is a wide range of interest of cycling in Hitchin.
* These groups need to be brought together ready for when tranche two money is released.
* We need to encourage those who have began cycling in lockdown to continue to do so.
* We can only do so if the infrastructure is in place such as adequate cycle paths and bike storage throughout the town and beyond.

**Marilyn Parkin:** Pirton Neighbourhood plan is ignored when any planning applications are submitted. Neighbourhood plans should not come behind the Local Plan.

**Cllr PC**:

* I have received an email from Marilyn and have arranged a meeting to speak with NHDC’s Planning Control and Conservation Manager about this topic.
* NHDC do need to take the Neighbourhood plan seriously as we acknowledge that residents put a lot of time and effort into these for the benefit of their communities.
* We are looking at a wider cycle network to link all the towns within the District as well as to nearby towns such as Cambridge, Luton etc.

**Cllr MSH:** We are looking to put more emphasis on Neighbourhood plans.

**Cllr IA** raised the query sent in advance about the path near Common Rise.

**Cllr EDH:** Noted that this issue is being dealt with by Cllr Kay Tart. Councillors are currently investigating who the land belongs to as this can be a barrier when enforcing repairs.

**Cara Baldwin:** Asked how NHDC are supporting people who work in the Arts?

**Cllr JB:** Unfortunately, Hertfordshire Year of Culture 2020 has been limited due to the pandemic. We acknowledge that people in these professions are losing their livelihoods. Cllr JB and Cllr KH have set up a meeting with Cara to discuss opportunities.

**Shirley Goldsmith:** Asked about the proposed addition of new flats near Garrison Court.

**Cllr SC:** Noted that there has not been any recommendation from officers yet. If officers are minded to agree the proposal, it will be presented to the Planning Committee and a decision will be made within three weeks.

**Cllr IA** raised a question which was left in the chat box which asked: what is NHDC doing about the issue of lorries using Verulam Road and causing disruption.

**Cllr SC:** HGV’s are ignoring weight restrictions in the town. Cllr Collins has already spoken to the Police on this matter as enforcement is needed.

**Cllr JB:** There are a whole raft of issues which we are trying to combat.

**Cllr SH:**

* Lorries seem to be taking alternate routes and going over speed limits.
* There is a government framework contract for local councils to sign up to Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) schemes. Cllr Harwood recommended that NHDC signs up to this.

**Cllr DA:** The issue is that we cannot use cameras to enforce traffic regulations. We have to lobby the Department for Transport to make camera enforcement the norm and not just something that is implemented where accidents have occurred.

**Cllr IA:** noted that a resident has asked if it’s possible to limit hours of lorries allowed in town centres.

**Cllr SC:** The issue is not about restrictions; it is around enforcement. It is a Police matter and we need officers on the ground.

**Cllr SH:** Introducing ANPR cameras could perhaps assist police in investigations/prosecutions. Could we pass a by law on this?

**Cllr PC:** Royston and Letchworth both have timings of weight limits. Hitchin doesn’t, we have been pushing for this. Police can use CCTV to prosecute but CCTV cameras are only found on the main routes.

**Marilyn Parkin asked:** What is the Council’s attitude towards MP Bim Afolami’s suggestion of free parking in Hitchin to aid economic recovery?

**Cllr MSH:** Bim is talking at Hitchin Committee which follows this meeting. You can watch the meeting live on YouTube.

YouTube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G6_7KLgFdSU>

**Cllr MSH:** NHDC currently have a 2-million-pound shortfall on income. Free parking will cost NHDC £200,000 a month.

**Cllr PC:** NHDC would rather contribute funds to arts venues and focus on supporting local businesses and leisure centres.

**Cllr IA** thanked everyone for attending the Hitchin Town Talk and welcomed residents to watch Hitchin Committee live on YouTube which would commence at 7.30pm. The meeting was closed at 7:03pm.