The Chairman, Councillor David Leal-Bennett, welcomed everybody to the Town Talk.

The next Town Talk will take place on Tuesday 8th September 2015 at 6.30pm at Hitchin Boys' School

**Present -**

* Cllr Bernard Lovewell
* Cllr Simon Harwood
* Cllr Richard Thake
* Cllr David Leal-Bennett
* Cllr Allison Ashley
* Cllr Judi Billing
* Cllr Frank Radcliff
* Cllr Ray Shakespeare-Smith
* Cllr Nicola Harris
* Claire Morgan – Communities Officer

**Issues raised this session**

1. Home-start North Herts - Faith Hoojer
2. Hitchin Toilets and Street Light in Hitchin - Colin Dunham
3. Bancroft Crossing - Keith Hoskins
4. Status of ’20 is Plenty’ Campaign - Elaine Simkiss
5. Proposed exhibition for new NH Museum - Brian Foreman
6. Plans for new entrance to Hitchin Station - Brendan Lee
7. **Home-start North Herts**

The organisation had applied for grant funding to the area committee but the grant had been withdrawn on the request of the Chairman of the committee. Cllr Leal-Bennett responded that this issue would be dealt with on the agenda of the Area Committee meeting. Cllr Billing, suggested that the group should receive grant funding. Cllr Thake stated that he could see no impediment to providing funding for the group. Cllr Leal-Bennett agreed that Councillors should have a short discussion immediately following the Town Talk in order to decide between them whether they should consider the grant at the Area Committee meeting this evening.

(*Following Town Talk, councillors agreed to consider the Home-start grant funding application at the Hitchin Area Committee meeting.)*

1. **Toilet Door on the Disabled Facility in the Arcade**

Mr Dunham raised the issue of the door to the disabled toilet in the arcade closing too quickly to allow some people with mobility issues to access the facility.

Mr Dunham stated that North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) Officers had informed him that there was not sufficient budget to change the closing mechanism which has been estimated to cost £3,000. Mr Dunham asked the Councillors if they might consider providing the funds from the Area committee budgets.

Cllr Allison Ashley explained that it would be against council policy for the Area Committee to fund that which should be covered from NHDC central budgets.

Cllr Radcliff stated that this issue should be examined centrally as the Authority should provide equality of access for disabled people across the whole North Hertfordshire district. It was agreed that this will be discussed by Councillors under ‘Any Other Business’ in the Area Committee meeting.

*(Following the meeting Cllr Leal-Bennet discussed the 'lack of funding' issue with Liz Green who promised to enquire and revert since there should be funding available.)*

**Hitchin Street Light that has been permanently on for over 12 months**

Mr Dunham went on to inform the Councillors of a street light located in the Biggin Car Park that is permanently on and has been illuminated for over a year. He reported the issue to Hertfordshire County Council, but has been informed by them that the light is on NHDC property and would therefore be NHDC responsibility.

**ACTION: Communities Officer will inform NHDC Parking Services**

1. **New pedestrian crossing at Bancroft**

Mr Hoskins explained that he was in receipt of a letter from the residents of Regal Court on Bancroft. The residents were concerned that the new crossing was a danger rather than asset. It was felt that a push button crossing might be preferable. It was thought that because the Belisha beacons are set back off the road they are not immediately noticeable to drivers who are not stopping at the crossing.

**ACTION: County Councillor Judy Billing will raise the issue with officers from Hertfordshire Highways.**

**4. Update on the ’20 is Plenty’ speed limit scheme.**

Ms Simkiss asked for an update from Councillors on the progress of the scheme to slow traffic in residential areas. Cllr Billing responded that Hertfordshire County Council has no budget to implement a scheme; however she was using her HCC locality budget to fund a ‘pilot’ project in Bearton Ward. Cllr Billing informed the group that the process is taking a long time due to legal processes involved. If the scheme is to be rolled out to other areas in the Town it will also require funding from County Councillors.

**ACTION: County Councillor Judy Billing will again raise the issue with officers from Hertfordshire Highways in order to progress matters.**

1. **Proposed exhibition for new NH Museum**

Mr Foreman informed the group that he had attended a tour of the Letchworth Museum in November 2014 prior to its closure. The Museum’s officer explained to the tour group that national touring art exhibitions were being selected for display at the new North Herts Museum opening on Brand Street in Autumn 2015. Mr Foreman raised concerns that local artists and art clubs would not be able to use the exhibition space. This issue could be a problem across the district as, in addition the Letchworth Art Centre will be closed for renovation and when re-opened will be hosting touring art exhibitions.

Cllr Thake responded that ‘one would hope that the museum will also make provision for local artists and clubs.

Cllr Radcliff responded that he understood these concerns and agreed that a balance would be needed between both touring exhibitions and local artists.

**ACTION: Concerns to be reported back to officers**

1. **Consultation on Station Approach improvements.**

Mr Lee asked if there was any consultation with Hitchin residents and Station users on the plans to improve the road layout on the approach to Hitchin Station.

Councillors informed Mr Lee that the proposed design is available to view on the Herts County Council web site for comment. The consultation period was 6 weeks but there is now approximately two weeks left in which comments will be accepted as part of the consultation.

The current road layout causes traffic issues, especially for vehicles turning right out of the station approach. Cllr Lovewell commented that bus companies have considered ceasing picking up passengers from the Station as the buses are delayed due to the traffic congestion.

1. **Any other business**

It was reported to the Councillors that the pilot No: 80 bus Sunday bus service which was in part funded from Area Committee budgets, as a pilot exercise, has not been issuing tickets on the bus which will prevent the bus company from evaluating the number of bus users utilising the service.

**ACTION: Bus company to be informed**

End (Meeting Closed at 7.00pm)

**Action Point - Summary**

* **Toilet Door on the Disabled Facility in the Arcade**
  + ACTION: Funding update requested
* **Hitchin Street Light that has been permanently on for over 12 months**
  + ACTION: Communities Officer will inform NHDC Parking Services
* **New pedestrian crossing at Bancroft**
  + ACTION: County Councillor Judy Billing will raise the issue with officers from Hertfordshire Highways.
* **Update on the ’20 is Plenty’ speed limit scheme.**
  + ACTION: County Councillor Judy Billing will again raise the issue with officers from Hertfordshire Highways.
* **Proposed exhibition for new NH Museum**
  + ACTION: Concerns to be reported back to officers
* No: 80 bus Sunday bus service
  + ACTION: Bus company to be informed

**Note:** All action points to be reported at the next Town Talk as item 1 on the agenda.