

RECORD OF DECISION MADE UNDER DELEGATED AUTHORITY

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

Any interest to declare/ or conflict and any dispensation granted for the Officer or Executive Member [Yes]

Cllr Keith Hoskins sits on the Committee of the Hitchin Festival as a Director (in a voluntary capacity). His interest is not pecuniary and he does not stand to personally profit from this event. He did not participate delegated decision and was not virtually present for the discussion and recommendation.

Cllr Judi Billing was at the virtual meeting and declared that she would be the decision maker, was acting as a member of the area (relevant Area Committee) and participated in the discussion and recommendation.

SERVICE DIRECTORATE: Legal and Community

1. DECISION TAKEN

The approval of funding awards from the Hitchin Committee budget to the following body:

£2,185 to Hitchin Festival to assist with creating a week-long series of events in the Dell Open Air Theatre at Woodside

2. DECISION TAKER

The Executive Member for Community Engagement in consultation with the Service Director – Legal and Community

3. DATE DECISION TAKEN:

24 June 2021

4. REASON FOR DECISION

4.1 Following the cessation of the Flexibility of Meeting Regulations 2020 Committees are required to physically meet should they wish to legally participate and make decisions. As this meeting is being held on a virtual platform, with no Chair or Vice Chair having been appointed at the Annual Council Meeting, no decisions can be made by the virtual meeting and any decisions on whether to award financial assistance to voluntary organisations and the use of discretionary spending needs to be via a recommendation to the Executive Member for Community Engagement in consultation with the Service Director, Legal and Community.

4.2 To enable the distribution of funds to the project outlined above, via the delegated authority process, subject to the considerations noted at paragraph 6 below. As the Hitchin Committee met virtually on 15th June, they were unable to make a lawful decision.

5. CONSULTATION WITH COMMITTEE MEMBERS

5.1 Consultation including the effect on stakeholders, partners and the public are contained within the report published with the Hitchin Virtual Committee agenda for the meeting held on 15 June 2021.

6. APPLICATION DETAILS

6.1 The Dell Open Air Theatre at Woodside

Applicant

Hitchin Festival

Project	Creating a week-long series of events in The Dell Open Air Theatre at Woodside
Sum requested	£2,185
Total project cost	£23,270
Joint funding	£1,585 Crowdfunding £8,000 Donations from local businesses
NHDC Policy met	YES
Council Priorities	Be a more welcoming and inclusive Council Build thriving and resilient communities Respond to challenges to the environment

The Hitchin Festival produces a yearly arts festival throughout the town of Hitchin each July. It brings together community groups, businesses and individuals as well as producing several of its own events. Hitchin Festival was established in March 1991.

The money will be spent on creating a week-long series of events in The Dell Open Air Theatre at Woodside. This is a space that was created by the council back in 1951 for performance and there has been a huge desire from the community to get the space up and running as a venue again.

In the 70th year since its creation and with outdoor venues seeing a resurgence because of Covid-19, there has never been a better time to see this beloved part of Hitchin restored and used again in the way it was intended. The Dell is situated next to the Queen Mother Theatre at Woodside in Hitchin. The planned events will take place daily from Saturday 24th July – Saturday 31st July.

The funding will be used towards hire of staging and technical equipment and to ensure the space remains safe and secure, with fencing and security present throughout the duration. In order to keep costs low, many performers are giving their time for as little as possible or in some cases for free, and they have involved a number of local groups and societies, including The Bancroft Players, Hitchin Thespians, Hitchin Rock Choir and Club 85.

The aim is that this year's event will not just be a one-off but an opportunity to show the community what can be achieved and hopefully start to create a vision for a longer-term plan that would see it be used as an outdoor theatre every summer.

The programme of events is advertised across Hitchin and the surrounding towns and villages through the Hitchin Festival. It will have a maximum capacity of 200 per performance. They expect approx. 1,500 audience members across the week. This number does not take into account all those volunteering or performing too, which comes to approximately 200. The Festival Box Office operates from The Town Centre Information Office in Hitchin and has a close connection with Hitchin BID and the Hitchin Initiative.

Promotion for the Hitchin Festival is already underway via social media and The Hitchin Festival is producing a programme this year in association with Hitchin BID to ensure it has maximum coverage. Approx. 15,000 copies will be delivered door to door in Hitchin and the surrounding villages. Events will be on sale through the festivals online box office as well as in person through the Hitchin Information Centre in Churchyard, Hitchin. The event is already being publicised through a crowdfunding campaign set up to help with running costs and the programme will be promoted through the longstanding Hitchin Festival

(see <https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/thedellatwoodsideopenairtheatre>).

Most of the money (after expenses) from ticket sales will go back into paying for the event. All evening events will require entry by prepaid ticket but prices for tickets are being kept low and affordable to all.

The opening of the Dell will benefit a large section of the community as they have planned events to target all ages. They have children's creative workshops and performances, live music for teens and several musical concerts and performances suitable for families of all ages. After a year of being unable to perform, those groups and individuals involved will benefit from the opportunity to do what they love in an open-air space. It is also a great chance to showcase the talent and creativity on offer in Hitchin and the surrounding area.

In future years, and hopefully with a longer run, they plan to open the programme up to an even wider variety of groups and truly celebrate the arts and entertainment on offer in the community.

The support of the council in providing an open-air space for Hitchin will be greatly appreciated by so many. They are already seeing the enthusiasm from local creatives, community groups and audiences who cannot wait to perform or see a performance in the space again. This project is a huge collaborative effort between creative individuals and community groups, and they hope that this is just the start in bringing the arts in Hitchin together like this to strengthen links for the future.

At the virtual meeting, having considered the matter, it was agreed:

- (1) That the Members of the Hitchin Committee supports the award of £2,185 in grant funding to Hitchin Festival to assist with creating a week-long series of events in the Dell Open Air Theatre at Woodside;
- (2) That the Executive Member for Community Engagement be requested to consider and support the grant funding application, as detailed in (1) above.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION: The awarding of financial assistance to voluntary organisations and the use of discretionary spending allows the Committee to further the aims of the Council Plan.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Usually the Chair and Vice Chair of the various Area Committees would have been elected following the Annual Council meeting. However, due to the pandemic and issues regarding the maximum number of people that could be accommodated within the Council Chamber the appointments did not take place.
- 7.2 Until the Area Committees have convened 'in person' and the respective Chairs and Vice Chairs elected they are not able to be consulted for the purposes of delegated decisions for grant aid/financial support.
- 7.3 Therefore an amendment has been made to 9.8.2 and 14.6.8 (b) (iii) of the Constitution on 1 June 2021, to enable the Executive Member for Community Engagement to continue to make delegated decisions – 'The Executive Member for Community Engagement, having consulted the Chair or Vice Chair of the relevant Area Committee, or where no Chair or Vice Chair – the Members of the Area Committee by majority or those responding, or confirming via virtual means, and Service Director: Legal and Community; of on recommendation of Grants Panel'.

- 7.4 Sections 9.8.1 (a) and 9.8.1 (b) of the Council's Constitution in respect of the Area Committees' Terms of Reference, notes the following:- To allocate discretionary budgets within the terms determined by the Council and to allocate devolved budgets and activities within the terms determined by the Council. This is outlined in the current Grant Policy agreed by Cabinet in January 2020. Section 9.8.2 (h) of the Constitution in respect of Area Committees' Terms of Reference notes that they may:- Establish and maintain relationships with outside bodies/voluntary organisations operating specifically with the area including, where appropriate, the provision of discretionary grant aid/financial support etc. but excluding grants for district-wide activities. However, if the Members of the Committee meets on a virtual or partly virtual platform, such decisions cannot be made and instead the Members Committee must make a recommendation, as per 9.3 above, to the Executive Member for Community Engagement, in consultation with the Service Director Legal and Community to allocate the funding from the respective budget.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 At the end of the 2020/21 financial year, the carry forward budget was £3,465 of which £2,000 has been allocated to the Peace Garden Sculpture project pending further funding being secured. This leaves an unallocated carry forward budget of £1,465.

The budget for 2021/22 is £11,000 providing a total of £12,465 to allocate this year.

- 8.2 The grant applications for this meeting total £2,185 and if the Members agree to recommend the award of this sum to the Executive Member for Community Engagement, this will leave a balance of £10,280.

9. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no relevant risk entries that have been recorded on Pentana Risk, the Council's performance and risk system. Individual events should have their own risk assessments in place to mitigate any health and safety issues. Whenever a request for grant funding for equipment is received, the recipient of the funding will be advised to obtain insurance for the item to avoid a repeat request for funding in the event of the equipment being stolen or damaged. There are no pertinent risk implications for the Authority associated with any items within this report.

10. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 10.2 Area committee funding is awarded to community groups that clearly demonstrate positive impact on the community and wider environment. The projects outlined in this report seek to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.

11. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The Social Value Act and "go local" requirements do not apply to this report.

12. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. Relating to Hitchin Festival creating a week-long series of events in The Dell Open Air Theatre at Woodside. The organisers are encouraging people who live close by (Hitchin residents) to walk to the outdoor venue. There is a footpath leading from the car park to the proposed site that will be used when transporting stage equipment, chairs, etc.

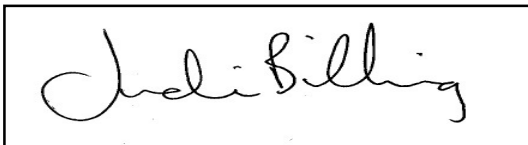
12.2. The area is currently in a state of disrepair and is known for antisocial behaviour – Fires, drug taking etc. The funding should go some way into helping clean up this area and to make it more secure for the rest of the community to use over the weeks and into the future. The fencing would also stop people from attempting to enter the wooded areas and would help in protecting the local wildlife. The organisers have also put measures in place to make sure that after every event that all litter is picked up and disposed of. Visitors will also be asked to make sure they pick up any rubbish they may have dropped. A ‘leave no trace’ approach.

13. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

13.1 There are no pertinent Human Resource implications associated with any items within this report.

NOTIFICATION DATE

25 June 2021



Signature of Executive Member Decision taker

Date ...24.06.21.....

Signature of Service Director: Legal and Community



Please Note: that *unless urgency provisions apply* EXECUTIVE decisions cannot be implemented until 5 clear working days have elapsed after the decision has been taken to allow for scrutiny call-in.

Call-in does not apply to NON-EXECUTIVE DECISIONS