

29 December 2006

Ref: DL/Scrutiny/Jan07
Contact: Donna Levett
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To: The Members of the Scrutiny Committee of the North Hertfordshire District Council

(Councillors Martin Stears (Chairman); M. Paterson (Vice-Chairman); David Billing, John Bishop, S. Bloxham, P.C.W. Burt, Paul Clark, Melissa Davey, Jane Gray, David Kearns, H.M. Marshall, M.R.M. Muir, Elliot Needham and R.L. Shakespeare-Smith.)
[Substitutes: Councillors Sal Jarvis and Lorna Kercher]

You are invited to attend a

MEETING OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

to be held in

**COMMITTEE ROOM 1, COUNCIL OFFICES, GERON
ROAD, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY**

on

TUESDAY, 9 JANUARY 2007

at

7.30 p.m.

**[Note: A Pre-Meeting For Members Of The Committee Will Take
Place At 7.00pm In Committee Room 3]**

Yours sincerely,



David Miley
Democratic Services Manager

AGENDA
PART I

ITEM	PAGE
1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE	-
2. MINUTES To take as read and approve as a true record the Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 11 December 2006.	-
3. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS Members should notify the Chairman of other business which they wish to be discussed by the Committee at the end of the business set out in the agenda. They must state the circumstances which they consider justify the business being considered as a matter of urgency. The Chairman will decide whether the item(s) raised will be considered.	-
4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING PARTY WHIP DIRECTIONS) To receive from Members of the Council any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda or any advice from a Member of this Committee concerning a party whip direction. Members should either declare a prejudicial or personal interest and are required to notify the Council of the nature of any interest declared. Members declaring a prejudicial interest should leave the room and not seek to influence the decision during that particular item of business.	-
5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION To receive petitions, comments and questions from members of the public. At the time of printing the agenda, no requests to speak had been received. Public participation requests received within the agreed time will be notified to Members as soon as practicable.	-
6. URGENT/GENERAL EXCEPTION ITEMS The Chairman to report on any urgent or general exception items which required his agreement. At the time of printing the agenda, the Chairman had not agreed any urgent or general exception items.	-
7. CALLED-IN ITEMS To consider any matters referred to the Committee for a decision in relation to a call-in of a decision. At the time of printing the agenda, no items of business had been called-in.	-

ITEM	PAGE
8. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS	-
9. QUESTIONS To receive and respond to any questions either set out in the agenda or tabled at the meeting. An answer to the supplementary question on planning appeals, raised at the last meeting of the Committee by Councillor Paul Clark, is attached. Any further questions received within the agreed time will be notified to Members as soon as practicable.	1
10. NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL – THE DRAFT FORWARD PLAN: 1 FEBRUARY 2007 – 31 MAY 2007 <i>To note items on the Council's Forward Plan and to give consideration to any items set out in the Plan prior to a decision being made.</i>	3
11. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2006/2007 REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY OFFICER <i>To consider the issues that the Scrutiny Committee plans to review at future meetings and the activities of its sub-groups.</i>	11
12. PRESENTATION BY PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR LEISURE & E-GOVERNMENT <i>To receive a presentation by Councillor Ian Knighton, Portfolio Holder for Leisure & E-Government.</i>	13
13. ITEMS REFERRED FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FINANCE SUB-GROUP <i>To receive recommendations from the Finance Sub-Group in relation to financial reports considered.</i>	15
14. NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE PLAY STRATEGY REPORT OF THE HEAD OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & CULTURAL SERVICES <i>To comment on the North Hertfordshire Play Strategy, prior to its consideration by Cabinet and Council.</i>	17
15. TOWN CENTRE PARTNERSHIP FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS REPORT OF THE HEAD OF POLICY, PARTNERSHIPS & PERFORMANCE <i>This report was under preparation at the time the agenda went to print and will be published as soon as possible.</i>	To Follow
16. MARKETS – POLICY FOR FUTURE MANAGEMENT	To

ARRANGEMENTS

Follow

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF LEISURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL
HEALTH

*This report was under preparation at the time the agenda went to print
and will be published as soon as possible.*

Future meetings of the Scrutiny Committee have been scheduled to take place on:

20 February 2007

20 March 2007

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 9 January 2007
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*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT	AGENDA ITEM No. 9
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TITLE OF REPORT: QUESTION

The following supplementary question regarding planning appeals was asked by Councillor Paul Clark at the meeting of the Committee held on 11 December 2006:-

“The information provided in the answer to the previous question states that 18 appeals have been defended by the Council’s Planning Officers, but this appears to be contrary to current policy. Where has this policy originated and at what point has it changed?”

The following response has been received from the Planning Control & Conservation Manager:

“The appeals concerned have been dealt with under the written representation procedure. With the agreement of both parties to this appeal procedure the Officer is not open to cross examination of his or her own professional opinion on the application and is able to fully defend the Council's decision in the exchange of written statements. Those appeals that Members have defended have been public inquiries where the professional integrity of an Officer could have been questioned both by the appellants' representatives and the Inspector. For the Officer concerned to give evidence would be against the advice of the Officers' professional Institute and may also have a detrimental effect on the outcome of the Council's case.

The policy of Officers defending the decisions of the Council in the case of written representation appeals has not changed and there is no intention to alter the current practice.”

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***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

AGENDA ITEM No.

10

**TITLE OF REPORT: NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL – THE DRAFT
FORWARD PLAN: 1 FEBRUARY 2007 – 31 MAY 2007**

To note items listed on the Council's Forward Plan and to give consideration to any items set out in the Plan prior to a decision being made.

The Forward Plan is attached.

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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

DRAFT Forward Plan of Key Decisions - 1 February 2007

The Forward Plan contains brief details of key decisions that the Council is likely to take over the next four-month period. You will also find details of contacts who can provide further information and hear your views.

Decision required and date first appearing on plan	Overview and Scrutiny	Decision maker	Date of decision	Main consultees	Method of consultation	Relevant documents	Costs or Savings	Portfolio Holder & Contact officer
Budget & Council Tax level set 11/06	Scrutiny Finance Sub-Group	Council (via Cabinet)	8 Feb 2007	CMT	meetings written		N/A	Cllr Terry Hone Norma.atlay@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474297
Approval of Ivel Court redevelopment scheme 07/06		Cabinet	27 Feb 2007	Portfolio Holder Officers LAPC Community	Meetings Workshops	Previous Cabinet reports	TBA	Cllr Terry Hone Barrie.jones@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474243
Strategic Flood Risk Assessment 10/06	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	27 Feb 2007	Portfolio Holder Officers	Meetings Briefings	Report	Within Existing budgets	Cllr Richard Thake Andy.beavan@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474317
Amendment / revision to the Private Sector Renewals Policy 01/07		Cabinet	27 Feb 2007					Cllr Sarah Wren Alan.davey@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 476362
Enforcement polices for the Housing & Environmental Health Service 10/06	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	27 Feb 2007	Portfolio Holder Representative forums Chamber of Commerce	Written comments Discussion with forums	NHDC Enforcement Policy Enforcement Concordat	Nil	Cllr Sarah Wren Andy.godman@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474293
Third Quarter Revenue Budget 2006/07 Spend Profile 11/06	Scrutiny Finance Sub-Group	Cabinet	27 Feb 2007	Officers	meetings	Budget papers	TBA	Cllr Terry Hone Clare.fletcher@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474470

Decision required and date first appearing on plan	Overview and Scrutiny	Decision maker	Date of decision	Main consultees	Method of consultation	Relevant documents	Costs or Savings	Portfolio Holder & Contact officer
Third Quarter Capital Budget 2006/07 Spend Profile 11/06	Scrutiny Finance Sub-Group	Cabinet	27 Feb 2007	Officers	meetings	Budget papers	TBA	Cllr Terry Hone Clare.fletcher@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474470
New/Revised Housing Strategy 08/06	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	27 Feb 2007					Cllr Sarah Wren Alan.davey@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 476362
Stevenage Area Action Plan – Issues and Options Public Consultation 12/06	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	27 Feb 2007	Officers	Written comments / meetings	In accordance with Statement of Community Involvement	N/A	Cllr Richard Thake John.ironside@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474626
Adoption of Building Control Policy 09/06	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	27 Feb 2007	Portfolio Holder	Meeting	Report to Cabinet	N/A	Cllr Richard Thake Ian.fullstone@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 476370
Building Control Charges Policy 01/07		Cabinet	27 Feb 2007	Portfolio Holder Customer Liaison Panel	Meeting	Report to Cabinet	N/A	Cllr Richard Thake Ian.fullstone@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 476370
Disposal Milestone Road Play Area, Hitchin 01/07		Cabinet	27 Feb 2007	Ward Members and Hitchin Area Committee	Meeting	Report to Cabinet	N/A	Cllr Terry Hone Barrie.jones@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474243
Agree an Organisational Development Strategy 01/07	PARC	Cabinet	27 Feb 2007	JSCC SCF CMT Portfolio Holder	Meetings	Report to Cabinet	TBA	Cllr John Smith John.robinson@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474655

Decision required and date first appearing on plan	Overview and Scrutiny	Decision maker	Date of decision	Main consultees	Method of consultation	Relevant documents	Costs or Savings	Portfolio Holder & Contact officer
New Contaminated Land Policy: Reasonable enquiries concerning appropriate persons 01/07		Cabinet	27 Feb 2007	Portfolio Holder Environment Agency	Meeting Written	NHDC Contaminated Land Strategy Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy	N/A	Cllr Sarah Wren Andy.godman@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474293
New Contaminated Land Policy: Remediation cost recovery 01/07		Cabinet	27 Feb 2007	Portfolio Holder Environment Agency	Meeting Written	NHDC Contaminated Land Strategy Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy	N/A	Cllr Sarah Wren Andy.godman@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474293
Howard Park & Gardens Lottery Application 02/07		Cabinet	27 Feb 2007	Partners/stakeholders Residents/ community groups. Project Steering Group Letchworth Area Committee	Web based survey, Planning for real exercise, public displays, meetings and written comments.	Draft Stage One Lottery submission.	TBA	Cllr Ian Knighton Cllr Lynda Needham Steve.geach@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474553
Arts, Museums and Heritage Strategy 01/07		Council (via Cabinet)	1 Mar 2007	Arts, Museums and Heritage Strategy Working Group/Forum Area Committees	Meetings, web Seminar	National, regional and county strategies	TBA	Cllr Tricia Gibbs Patrick.candler@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474823
Area Governance & Costs of Democracy Savings 02/07		Council (via Cabinet)	1 Mar 2007	Members Area Committees	Meetings All Member workshop	Report to Cabinet	TBA	Cllr Tricia Gibbs Patrick.candler@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474823

Decision required and date first appearing on plan	Overview and Scrutiny	Decision maker	Date of decision	Main consultees	Method of consultation	Relevant documents	Costs or Savings	Portfolio Holder & Contact officer
London Luton Airport Phase1 Planning Application 04/06	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	27 Mar 2007		Written Comments	Phase 1 Planning Application	TBA	Cllr Richard Thake Mark.wilson@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474359
Royston Conservation Area Review Newnham Conservation Area Review 12/06		Cabinet	27 Mar 2007	Town and Parish Councils Local groups Residents	Exhibition Meetings Questionnaire Web-site	Proposed final version of Conservation Area Review documents	N/A	Cllr Richard Thake Mary.caldwell@north-herts.gov.uk 01462474613
Revised Community Strategy for North Herts 11/05	PARC	Council (via Cabinet)	29 Mar 2007	LSP partners/stakeholders residents visioning groups COMPACT	meetings press release website public event	community strategy draft	TBA	Cllr Tricia Gibbs liz.green@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474230
Best Value Performance Plan 2007/08 02/07	PARC	Council (Via Cabinet)	May 2007		meetings written	BVPP 2007/08	N/A	Cllr Andrew Young ola.alabi@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474659
Core Strategy / Decelopment Control Policies Preferred Options Consultation 02/07		Cabinet	May 2007	Local Groups, Cllrs, Relevant Statutory Organisations and other Herts Partners Member Working Party	Written comments	In accordance with the Statement of Community Involvement	N/A	Cllr Richard Thake Andy.beavan@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474317
Final Quarter Revenue Budget 2006/07 Spend Profile 02/07	Scrutiny Finance Sub-Group	Cabinet	May 2007	Officers	meetings	Budget papers	TBA	Cllr Terry Hone Clare.fletcher@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474470
Final Quarter Capital Budget 2006/07 Spend Profile 02/07	Scrutiny Finance Sub-Group	Cabinet	May 2007	Officers	meetings	Budget papers	TBA	Cllr Terry Hone Clare.fletcher@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474470

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

PENDING ITEMS

Decision required and date first appearing on plan	Overview and Scrutiny	Decision maker	Date of decision	Main consultees	Method of consultation	Relevant documents	Costs or Savings	Portfolio Holder & Contact officer
Adoption of a revised Housing Allocation Policy 02/07	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	TBA	Portfolio Holder Common Housing Register partners DCLG	Meetings & written invitation to comment	NHDC Allocation Policy Homelessness Strategy	No cashable savings	Cllr Sarah Wren Andy.godman@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474293
Adoption of a revised policy relating to statutory nuisance investigations 02/07	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	TBA	Portfolio Holder Environment Agency	Meetings & written invitation to comment	Environmental Protection Act 1990 CIEH Best Practice Guide	No cashable savings	Cllr Sarah Wren Andy.godman@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474293
Stevenage Area Action Plan – Issues and Options Public Consultation 12/06	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	TBA	Officers	Written comments / meetings	In accordance with Statement of Community Involvement	N/A	Cllr Richard Thake John.ironside@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474626
Annual Review of Financial Regulations & Contract Procurement Rules 2007/08 03/07	Scrutiny Finance Sub-Group	Cabinet	June 2007	Governance Officer Group	meetings	Audit files	TBA	Cllr Terry Hone barriejones@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474243
Annual Statement of Accounts 2006/07 03/07	Scrutiny Finance Sub-Group	Cabinet	June 2007	Officers	meetings	Closure papers	TBA	Cllr Terry Hone Clare.fletcher@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474470

Decision required and date first appearing on plan	Overview and Scrutiny	Decision maker	Date of decision	Main consultees	Method of consultation	Relevant documents	Costs or Savings	Portfolio Holder & Contact officer
Financial Management Strategy 2007/08 04/07	Scrutiny Finance Sub-Group	Cabinet	July 2007	Officers	meetings	General Ledger and Budget papers	TBA	Cllr Terry Hone Norma.atlay@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474297

**TITLE OF REPORT: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2006/2007
REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY OFFICER****1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report gives details about the topics that the Scrutiny Committee plans to scrutinise and gives an update on the work of the Task and Finish Groups.

2. FORWARD PLAN

- 2.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key decision and has not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

3. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

9 Jan 07	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Leisure & E-Government Portfolio Holder ▪ Markets – Policy for Future Management Arrangements ▪ Town Centre Partnership Funding Proposals ▪ Adoption of District Wide Play Strategy
20 Feb 07	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community Engagement Portfolio Holder ▪ Chairman's Review ▪ Enforcement Policies For The Housing & Environmental Health Service ▪ New/Revised Housing Strategy ▪ Stevenage Area Action Plan – Issues And Options Public Consultation ▪ Residential Parking – Report On Displacement Effects, Pay & Display, Consultations, Non-Residential Cpz Users (Outstanding Issues From The Task & Finish Group) ▪ Cabinet Response To Residential Parking Task & Finish Group Recommendations (To Be Combined As One Report With The One Above)
20 March 07	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Annual Report ▪ London Luton Airport Phase 1 – Planning Application ▪ Strategic Flood Risk Assessment

4. SUB-GROUPS**4.1 Affordable Housing Task & Finish Group**

On 6 December 2006, Members of the Group met with the Leisure, Culture & Safer Communities Portfolio Holder, the Planning Services Portfolio Holder, the Housing Strategy & Development Manager and the Affordable Housing Development Officer at Mid Bedfordshire District Council. The purpose of this meeting was to share best practice and to obtain information on their strategies for affordable housing provision.

The next meeting will take place on 22 January 2006, where the Group will summarise their work and start to develop the recommendations for their final report.

4.2 **Partnership Working with Parishes Task & Finish Group**

On 19 December 2006, the Group met with the Planning Control & Conservation Manager. They discussed the existing communication process between Parishes and the Planning Department and identified some areas of improvement to be considered.

Their next meeting will be in early January 2007 where they will be meeting with Members of East Herts District Council.

4.3 **Finance Sub-Group**

This Group met on 14 December 2006 and looked at the Draft Budget. The Group requested some additional information on some specific items in preparation for their meeting on 23 January 2007 where they will be looking at the final version of the Budget.

5. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

5.1 Members are asked to note the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2006/2007.

6. **REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

6.1 To enable the Scrutiny Committee to plan and carry out its workload efficiently and effectively.

7. **CONTACT OFFICER**

7.1 Grace Crawford (Scrutiny Officer)
Tel. 01462 474612
E-Mail: grace.crawford@north-herts.gov.uk

PRESENTATION BY THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR LEISURE & E-GOVERNMENT
PRESENTATION BY COUNCILLOR IAN KNIGHTON, THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR
LEISURE & E-GOVERNMENT

This Item will take the format of an oral presentation

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TITLE OF REPORT: ITEMS REFERRED FROM FINANCE SUB-GROUP – 14 DECEMBER 2006

The Finance Sub-Group met on Thursday 14 December 2006 to consider the **Draft Budget Proposals 2007 – 2008**.

Request for Further Information

Members of the Scrutiny Finance Sub-Group have requested the following additional information. They will consider the responses when they look at the Final Draft Budget on 23 January 2007:

- SG1 - Officers to provide additional information as to what role would need to be fulfilled, what percentage of time and by whom.
- SG7 - Officers to provide information on charges for the building and the groups that have evening meetings.
- SG9 - Officers to provide more statistical information on incidents on days when the service is not provided and clarify if any contact has been made with the police. Officers to review wording: **'the reduced service may attract criticism from the public and our partners (i.e. the Police) as it has a high, and increasing number of users'**.
- SG10 - Officers to provide data for 5 years on houses brought into use and the number of houses identified.
- SG17 - Officers to provide requested information on how many buildings are at risk, how many could claim for assistance and how they get on the risk register.
- SG19 - Officers to provide information on when was the strategy introduced, what sites are earmarked for investigation and resourcing issues with a reduced budget.
- SG25 - Officers to provide details of the charging regime.
- SG26 - Officers to provide details of the charging regime and how many street names is this based on.
- RG4 - A report is requested Members to review why the bid failed.
- RG8 - Officers to provide information on the role of the job and how the role would be provided i.e. dedicated paid officer.

Cabinet Response

At its meeting held on 19 December 2006, Cabinet agreed that officers would provide the additional information requested to all Members of the Council via the Members' Information Service.

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*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT	AGENDA ITEM No. 14
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TITLE OF REPORT: NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE PLAY STRATEGY
REPORT OF THE HEAD OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURAL SERVICES

Attached is the report that will be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 16 January 2007.

The Scrutiny Committee has asked to comment on the report before it is considered by Cabinet. Members' views are invited.

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TITLE OF REPORT: NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE PLAY STRATEGY

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURAL SERVICES
PORTFOLIO HOLDER: COUNCILLOR TRICIA GIBBS

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet endorsement of the Play Strategy for North Hertfordshire.

2. FORWARD PLAN

- 2.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on 1 December 2006.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The North Herts Play Strategy (2007-2012) is the first dedicated Play Strategy for the District Council. Its creation follows significant reforms of children's services in the preceding five years and will assist the Council in meeting its commitments to the 'Every Child Matters: Change for Children programme'.
- 3.2 The Government-commissioned document 'Making the Case for Play', produced by the Children's Play Council (2002), has highlighted the importance of play in children's development and raised its profile nationally. In 2005, central Government pledged £200 million to improve children's play facilities, and in November of that year the Big Lottery Fund (BLF) launched a £155 million Children's Play Initiative.
- 3.3 Each District Council has been allocated a proportion of the BLF Play funds, with North Hertfordshire entitled to up to £227,000 over three years. However, in order to draw down these funds, Districts have to make a written application setting out their intentions. Part of this criteria is that Councils have a Play Strategy and Play Partnership.
- 3.4 North Hertfordshire established a Play Partnership in December 2004 which has been proactive in assisting officers create this Strategy. The Children's Services Team hopes to be in a position to submit its application for its funding allocation in March 2007, following adoption of the Strategy by full Council.
- 3.5 The Council has also been instrumental in supporting the establishment of the District Children's Trust.

4. NORTH HERTS PLAY STRATEGY

- 4.1 The Strategy identifies a policy objective whereby:

"The Council supports the right of every local child to be able to enjoy a range of play activities, and is committed to working with all play providers (whether commercial, charitable, community-led or statutory agencies) to ensure a wide choice of both organised and informal play opportunities. The Council recognises that play provides a

wide range of development opportunities for both children and the communities in which they live.”

- 4.2 The Strategy links with many other NHDC Strategies (Play Area and Outdoor Youth Provision Strategy; Sports Development Strategy; Pavilions, Playing Fields & Sports Pitches Strategy; Rural Strategy and the Social Inclusion Strategy) and indicates the desire to promote a range of different opportunities to local children.
- 4.3 The Strategy links into the Council's key aims, specifically:
- An increase in the number of young people engaging in sporting activities (Healthier).
 - We will work to develop an extended range of services for the young.... to reduce social exclusion (Equal).

In addition to the above, improved play services can also promote safer communities through the delivery of diversionary activities, and can also contribute to sustainable communities by making the built environment child friendly.

- 4.4 On a regional level the Strategy is referred to in the North Herts & Stevenage and Royston, Buntingford & Bishop Stortford's PCT's Health Improvement Plans, the North Herts Community Safety Strategy and the County's Children and Young Peoples Plan. In addition, it links into national initiatives such as 'Children's Centres Initiative' and the 'Extended Schools Programme'. The Strategy will also assist the multi-agency North Herts District Children's Trust Partnership achieve its objectives and outcomes.
- 4.5 The Strategy places NHDC in a position to facilitate the delivery of a range of services in partnership with other organisations. This will ensure that the Council works as part of a multi-agency approach to ensure delivery of the key outcomes detailed in 'Every Child Matters' - part of the Education Act 2004 which places a duty on a number of agencies to co-ordinate efforts for children's wellbeing.
- 4.6 The Strategy details a number of key aims and objectives which will help deliver the following broad outcomes:
- Increased participation of children in play activities.
 - To encourage children to develop increasingly healthy lifestyles.
 - To improve children's social, physical and intellectual development through a range of appropriate activities.
 - To increase the awareness amongst parents, carers and stakeholding agencies of the value of play.
 - To encourage communities to take ownership of the delivery and development of play activities.
- 4.7 In order to achieve these outcomes the Children's Services Team will be taking action in the following areas:
- Working in partnership with NHDC's Parks and Open Spaces Team to develop a range of outdoor activities on public land.
 - Deliver flagship events to encourage Town and Parish Councils to work in partnership and deliver more play opportunities locally.
 - Improve provision for children with disabilities by working with agencies that specialise in both delivery of dedicated schemes and specialist staff training.

- Expanding and developing the existing rural play project and introducing a 'Play Ranger' provision across the district.
- Working with Herts County Council to develop 'children's centres' and out of school opportunities (extended schools).
- Develop a specialist children's facility in Bancroft Gardens which will link into existing youth provision.
- Improve and develop techniques for consulting with children.
- Proactively look for opportunities to draw down external funds for new projects.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no legal implications pertaining to this report.
- 5.2 The Cabinet Terms of Reference allow for the development of Council Policy in respect of various matters, including "leisure, sport, recreation and the arts".

6. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no financial and risk implications pertaining to this report.
- 6.2 The cost to the authority to run Children's Services excluding sports development in 2006/07 is projected to be £118,300 (exclusive of internal recharges). In addition, the Children's Services Team also hosts the Rural Play project which is projected to cost £49,730, of which £41,070 is grant aided through the children's fund.
- 6.3 The Action Plan listed in the Strategy will predominantly be undertaken within the existing Children's Services budget and sourcing of external funds. However the Children's Services Team have highlighted the need to secure funding for the Rural Play project in the 2008/2009 financial year. A 2008/2009 growth bid was included in the Service and Financial Planning process, although as the growth bid is for 2008/2009, this is for information only and will need to be resubmitted as part of the 2008/2009 planning process.
- 6.4 By raising awareness of the importance of play there may be a future need for an increase and improvement in local children's facilities irrespective of who owns them.

7. HUMAN RESOURCE AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no human resource and equalities implications.

8. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS

- 8.1 The draft Play Strategy has been discussed with the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement and designated 'Children's Champions' representing all Council political groups. The North Herts Play Partnership has also been given the opportunity to comment on previous drafts of the Strategy with comments taken into account.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 That Cabinet endorse the Play Strategy 2007-2012 and refer it to full Council for adoption.

10. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 The Play Strategy helps the Council meet its strategic objectives to:
- Promote first class leisure and cultural facilities to contribute to healthy living for all our citizens.
 - Target resources at areas of disadvantage in the district to reduce social exclusion and improve the quality of life for everyone.

11. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Play Strategy Executive Summary

12. CONTACT OFFICERS

- 12.1 Rachel Ansbro (Acting Children's Services Development Manager)
Tel. 01462 474333
E-Mail: rachel.ansbro@north-herts.gov.uk
- 12.2 Tim Stephen (Community Development Manager)
Tel. 01462 474386
E-Mail: tim.stephen@north-herts.gov.uk
- 12.3 Katie White (Senior Lawyer)
Tel. (x 4315) katie.white@north-herts.gov.uk
- 12.4 Clare Fletcher, Accountancy Manager (x 4470) clare.fletcher@north-herts.gov.uk

13. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Draft Play Strategy – copies available in the Members' Room and electronic versions are available on request from the Committee Services Section.

Appendix 1 – Executive Summary of North Hertfordshire Play Strategy

Introduction:

This strategy emphasises the significance of play to the learning and development of children and young people, and that North Herts District Council and its partners have a crucial role in encouraging this development. The Strategy also affirms that the provision of positive play opportunities can help the community meet its strategic objectives and help in delivering wider national government programmes. However this can only be achieved by working in partnership, both strategically and operationally, with a range of agencies.

New National Initiatives:

During the last three years the Government has embarked upon one of the biggest reforms of children's services in recent times. The Every Child Matters: Change for Children programme, significantly alters the way services should be provided for children and young people. The five Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes provide a clear vision for local authorities and those agencies that work with children and young people. This strategy is part of this vision.

At the last General Election the Government pledged £200 million of National Lottery funding to improve children's play facilities. The subsequent government report 'Getting Serious About Play' set out a national strategy to identify how this funding should be used. In November 2005, The Big Lottery Fund announced the £155 million Children's Play Initiative informing Local Authorities of the funding allocation that was available to develop and improve play provision in their area. The initiative, launched in March 2006, requires Local Authorities to have a play strategy and a Play Partnership. North Hertfordshire District Council has been invited to apply for £227,475 to create, improve and develop local play opportunities.

Nationally, and locally, there is a new drive to improve children's services and play. A play strategy will bring together the government directives and local priorities to provide better play services for North Herts children.

A play strategy for North Hertfordshire can assist in supporting many of North Hertfordshire District Council's strategic objectives. In addition to play being beneficial within its own right there are also many extrinsic benefits;

- Play can help encourage responsible citizenship and help create safer communities
- Play can promote positive behaviour and can be used as a tool to keep children and young people away from undesirable pursuits.
- Play can help children stay active and can steer them towards leading a healthy and active lifestyle
- Play can also help educate children and make them aware of the different communities and cultures represented in our population.
- Play provision can be targeted at areas of disadvantage and can help reduce social exclusion.

Play Policy Objectives:

The North Herts Play Strategy has identified the following 7 policy objectives which will underline all play and leisure provision for children and young people in North Herts:

1. Every child and young person in North Herts will have access to good quality playgrounds, play areas and open spaces which meet their needs for variety, accessibility, choice, open space, adventure and play aspirations

2. To raise awareness of play provision in North Herts, the importance of play, to promote positive perceptions of play in the community and to provide access to accurate and comprehensive information on play opportunities within the district
3. To ensure that disabled children and young people have access to the widest possible range of play opportunities, and that play in North Herts conforms to the minimum requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act
4. To provide mobile play opportunities which can be accessed by those areas in the district where play provision is lacking
5. To assist the development of a play workforce in North Herts
6. Improve access to play service and provision through partnership working with local play providers and stakeholder agencies
7. Ensure the Council consults with children and young people on matters that affect them

These objectives state North Hertfordshire District Council's intent to work with its partners to provide better services for children. This strategy has identified a number of recommendations for action focusing on improving play services in North Herts. The full action plan can be found on pages 29-39.

The North Herts Play Strategy will come under ongoing reviews and revisions so that it stays relevant and up-to-date with developments in play and children's services within the district. The cost of these developments will be met from within existing internal budgets and external grant funds, by bidding for new funds, working with partners and by generating additional income and resources.

*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT	AGENDA ITEM No. 15
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TITLE OF REPORT: TOWN CENTRE PARTNERSHIP FUNDING PROPOSALS
REPORT OF THE HEAD OF POLICY, PARTNERSHIPS & PERFORMANCE

Attached is the report that will be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 16 January 2007.

The Scrutiny Committee has asked to comment on the report before it is considered by Cabinet. Members' views are invited.

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TITLE OF REPORT: TOWN CENTRE PARTNERSHIP FUNDING PROPOSALS
REPORT OF THE HEAD OF POLICY, PARTNERSHIPS AND PERFORMANCE

PORTFOLIO HOLDER : Councillor Mrs Tricia Gibbs

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 To present the background to the establishment, legal status and operational procedures of the District's three existing Town Centre Partnerships.
- 1.2 To present a business plan for future funding of the existing Town Centre Partnerships, and the establishment of town centre support for Baldock, as requested to support growth bid RG9 in the annual Service and Financial Planning proposals for 2007/2008.

2. FORWARD PLAN

- 2.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan in December 2006.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Authority currently provides £50,000 per annum funding to three Town Centre Partnerships, all of which are established, funded and operated in an agreed manner to reflect the needs of their particular town. The issue of parity of funding, however, has come very much to the fore in the light of recent changes in Letchworth and the additional funding requirements placed on us in respect of Baldock town centre. The current situation in each town is outlined below.

HITCHIN TOWN CENTRE INITIATIVE

- 3.2 Hitchin Town Centre Initiative (HTCI) is now in its 11th year of operation and is formally established as a Company Limited by Guarantee. Funding for the Partnership is provided by North Herts District Council (NHDC) and Herts County Council (HCC) as well as the various retailers, financial institutions and professionals operating within the town centre. When originally set up, it was envisaged that the District Council contribution would be time-limited for a three-year period only. The Partnership is a flourishing and successful one, acknowledged nationally by the recent recognition of Keith Hoskins as Town Centre Manager of the Year.

- 3.3 The Hitchin Town Centre Manager is employed by the Partnership and the Council's direct contribution (£27,500) is effectively for the numerous initiatives undertaken by that Partnership, not a direct contribution to salaries; this sum is increased by membership receipts and gives a total cash turnover for the Partnership in the region of £150,000 per annum; this sum does include receipts for auctions, rental of Market Square for events, entertainments etc. Additional funding is provided by the Hitchin Area Committee discretionary budget for specific events or decorations.

LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY TOWN CENTRE PARTNERSHIP

- 3.4 Letchworth Garden City Town Partnership is a non-profit making business Partnership organisation which was established in 2001. The Partnership is currently funded equally by the District Council and by the LGC Heritage Foundation who contribute

£15,000 each per annum. Other funding to the Partnership is received from retailers and businesses within the town centre including around £3,500 membership fee receipts.

- 3.5 Whilst the independent Town Centre Partnership is actually responsible for the recruitment and employment of the Town Centre Manager, the salary is paid directly via the NHDC payroll, which effectively means that the LGCHF contribution is paid directly into the economic development salary budget held by the Head of PPP. The agreement with the Heritage Foundation has previously been that any underspend of funding provided will be returned to them each year end, the most recent totalling around £2,000 at the end of 2005.
- 3.6 In consideration of the extensive proposals for the redevelopment of Letchworth Town Centre, the Partnership has determined the future remit which will fall to the Town Centre Manager. It has been proposed by LGCHF to consider increasing the funding provided to the Partnership in order to employ a person with considerably more complex project experience, and especially regeneration of town centres, at a higher salary. The salary on offer, £45,000 upwards, is to continue to be funded by NHDC at £15,000 per annum with the remainder plus on costs being borne by the Heritage Foundation; the new Town Centre Manager will commence early in the New Year. Agreement will then need to be reached with the LGCHF regarding salary payments, since it is likely to be untenable that the Authority continue to provide payroll support when our payment is a minority part of the whole cost.
- 3.7 The job description for the new role has been agreed by all partners, and in terms of NHDC's involvement, there remains a clear commitment that the terms we agree with any given Service Level Agreement are to be achieved by the postholder. However, the establishment of the Partnership as a Company Limited by Guarantee is currently underway in order to provide a robust legal status for the contractual obligations arising from the employment of the new Town Centre Manager.
- 3.8 Letchworth Garden City Town Centre Partnership has also previously received additional funding via the Letchworth Area Committee discretionary budget, including £10,000 worth of demountable market stalls for the very successful farmers' markets.

ROYSTON TOWN CENTRE PARTNERSHIP

- 3.9 The Royston Forum is the youngest of the District's Partnerships, having been in existence since 2004. In order to facilitate the establishment of a robust financial status early in its development, the Royston Town Council originally took on responsibility for the management of funds. However, the Partnership has recently become a Company Limited by Guarantee, effective from the end of June 2006.
- 3.9 The Forum receives £7,500 funding from North Herts District Council, £10,000 from the Royston Town Council and additional contributions from local employers totalling £5,000 per annum approximately.
- 3.10 In consideration of the size of Royston Town Centre, number of retailers and businesses etc which the Partnership has to support, it was agreed at the establishment that a part time Town Centre Manager should be appointed and this is still the case. Hence the overall 'pot' currently available to the Partnership of £22,500 is significantly lower than that for the two larger towns of Hitchin and Letchworth Garden City.

- 3.11 Royston Area Committee has also considered and awarded a number of discretionary grants to support the Partnership's work, notably a one off allocation of £7,500 towards promotional events for the town including the Royston Kite Festival, Easter Egg Hunt etc.

BALDOCK TOWN CENTRE PARTNERSHIP

- 3.12 The Baldock Town Centre Partnership is very much in its infancy, having so far held only a small number of meetings, but has an enthusiastic membership of around 25 businesses contributing to its development, with a core of around four businesses represented at the steering group itself.
- 3.13 The opening of the bypass almost eight months ahead of time has greatly accelerated the need for action to increase the footfall on the High Street, although it would also be fair to say that adverse publicity from businesses affected most by the lack of passing trade has not helped the other traders or market either. Funding has already been found (by making other budget savings) within the Economic Development Budget held by the Head of PPP to provide initial support to the Partnership in terms of additional postage, administration etc, but this is a short term 'fix' and unsustainable in the longer term.
- 3.14 Baldock Town Centre Partnership currently needs funding for initiatives such as
- the creation of a promotional brochure encouraging visitors to the town;
 - the creation of a website promoting Baldock as a town to enjoy;
 - determining the types of business currently established or to be encouraged to the town centre in order to increase visits and particularly footfall.

£4,500 received by the Authority under LABGI has been made available to pump prime this development.

- 3.15 The Town Centre Managers for both Hitchin and Royston have been instrumental in providing start up advice and support regarding the formal establishment of the Partnership, again as a Company Limited by Guarantee and it is anticipated that this will continue in the foreseeable future.

4. TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT - GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- 4.1 The Town Centre Partnerships are all funded via a Service Level Agreement (SLA) arrangement, generally for a period of three years, with annual formal monitoring of progress against the agreed targets. The majority of the SLAs in place with the Authority are used to fund statutory, community and voluntary sector initiatives, not such formal, economic Partnerships such as this. The overall budget for 'economic Partnerships' lies in the Head of PPP's area of responsibility and delegated powers. The use of SLAs for these Partnerships is simply as a tool to establish clear, funded priorities and targets to measure their success. The Area Committees do not have delegated powers regarding decision making regarding SLAs.
- 4.2 The Partnerships are all resourced by the Senior Strategy Officer (currently a vacant post) within the Policy, Partnerships and Performance Team. This officer attends the Partnership meetings, draws up the requirements of individual SLAs for the coming year and provides ongoing support in terms of local initiatives, identifying other relevant officers within the Authority etc. It is proposed that whilst other areas of this officers'

work may change to reflect the latest policy agenda and team requirements, this direct support provided to our town centres will remain.

- 4.3 Elected Member representation at the existing Partnerships is:
- Hitchin** Cllrs J Billing, Sheard and Ashley
 - Letchworth** Cllrs Paterson and Kercher
 - Royston** Cllr Hill, County Councillor Doug Drake and a representative from the Town Council
 - Baldock** Cllrs Knighton, Muir, Kirkland and Weeks

5. FUTURE FUNDING PROPOSALS

- 5.1 The funding of each Partnership has been determined at the outset, according to local need and amended as each Partnership has sought additional funding for given projects. This lack of strategic approach has led to a disparity in funding which should be addressed given a number of factors, such as the change in focus at Letchworth and with the new Partnership development at Baldock etc.
- 5.2 It is therefore proposed that the funding allocation for each town should now be based on the population of the individual town served. Taking the example of Hitchin, our longest established Partnership, this currently receives £27,500 per annum NHDC direct funding with a population of 30,851 (census 2001). If the same premise were to be attached to each of the towns, working on the basis of 10,000 population (rounded) the figures which should be paid would be (figures in brackets representing current funding allocations);

	Proposed	Current	Population
Hitchin	£27,500	(£27,500)	30,851
Letchworth	£27,500	(£15,000)	32,932
Royston	£13,750	(£7,500)	14,750
Baldock	*£9,165	(£nil)	9,866
	£77,915	£50,000	

**see para 5.3 below*

- 5.3 These proposals would therefore represent a growth on current budgets of £27,915, plus a proposed additional 'pump priming' grant to Baldock of £5,000 *in the first year only* in order to establish the Partnership and any Town Centre Management input required. Total growth required would therefore be £32,915. The growth bid contained in the Service and Financial Planning growth list is £35,000, an estimated figure submitted prior to completion of this formal business plan.
- 5.4 The current funding arrangements with the Town Centre Partnerships are that we are nearing the end of the first financial year of a three year SLA, although we retain the right to alter that arrangement when conditions require that we do so; the SLA requires that we give Partnerships three months notice of intention to change in order that they can make any alternative funding arrangements.

- 5.5 However, the increasing driver from Government is about sustainability of funding sources sufficiently to allow enterprise by groups and Partnerships, but also to encourage their ability to become self-resourcing in the longer term.

To this end, it is proposed that the funding identified at 5.2 above should be delivered over two x three year SLAs which would decrease to nil at year seven (reducing approximately 15% p.a.). This would provide sufficient warning of intention to withdraw funding gradually, and in line with our decreasing focus on our prosperous objective, and actively encourage Partnerships to source alternative funding too.

This would result in annual funding as follows;

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Hitchin	£27500	£23375	£19869	£16888	£14355	£12200
Letchworth	£27500	£23375	£19869	£16888	£14355	£12200
Royston	£13750	£11687	£9934	£8444	£7177	£6100
Baldock	£9165 *	£7790	£6621	£5628	£4784	£4066

* + £5,000 additional pump priming for year one only

At 31st March 2013, funding for all Partnerships would reduce to nil.

6. OTHER FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 It must not be forgotten in the consideration of funding allocations made above, that the support of the relevant Area Committee will also continue and thus awards from the discretionary budget could be considered for specific projects or for additional support to fund Town Centre Partnership administration.
- 6.2 The Government White Paper on local government reform promotes the idea of BIDS being rolled out across the country, advocating that it would be a more visible local tax for which business and commercial sector could see the direct benefit, but that is of course also subject to local political and business approval. Both Hitchin and Letchworth Town Centre Partnerships have recently indicated that they could be interested in pursuing the initial consultation required to commence the implementation of a BID, but this must be approached carefully, in respect of this being another potential 'tax' on businesses and one which NHDC will also be required to resource.
- 6.3 The issue of charging for on street trading and 'A' Boards are both rather contentious areas for Town Centre Partnerships and Managers alike; they are very much an enforcement function which cannot currently be delegated to those parties given the independent nature by which the Partnership functions are set up. Town Centre Managers are not officers of the Authority and therefore cannot generally be given delegated authority to act on our behalf.

However, a review of enforcement functions undertaken by the Authority is currently underway, and it may be possible for Town Centre Partnerships to play a more local role in enforcement of street trading licences in the future. This will be reported on separately in due course, including the consideration of constitutional and financial implications or benefits.

- 6.4 Preliminary, informal discussions regarding the potential for 'shared services' have already commenced in two towns. Through local business networks, the Partnerships often have the ability to resource services such as maintenance of premises, hanging baskets etc more cost effectively and yet to similar standard than the Council and this is an area which will command greater consideration in the future. The caveat, of course, is that the devolution of such services does not substantially reduce critical mass of the Council or its contractors, or future economies of scale afforded by a district wide contract.

The key benefits to the Partnerships themselves is the ability to create additional opportunity for local business employment, both within the town centre and local industrial areas.

- 6.5 Consideration of a central point of contact for town centre issues within the authority is already underway, in order to make the process of seeking permission for events, reporting streetscene concerns etc much more straightforward.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The main legal implications surround the status of the Partnerships, which are currently each established, or in the process of being established, as a 'company limited by guarantee'.

8. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The proposal at 5.2 does necessitate a growth of £32,915 against current town centre budget provision. However, this would reduce to £27,915 additional funding by the end of year one, given the removal of the £5,000 pump priming grant to Baldock Town Centre Partnership. The proposal to reduce funding throughout the town centres by 15% per annum approximately over six years will reduce both the annual and longer term financial commitment by the authority.
- 8.2 In the longer term, the proposal to reduce our funding to these Partnerships over a period of years reduces ongoing budgetary commitment on the authority.

9. HUMAN RESOURCE AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Authority has no direct human resource implications, since apart from the administrative payroll function provided to Letchworth Garden City Town Centre Partnership, there are no Council employees within the Partnerships themselves.
- 9.2 The SLA established for each Partnership requires that the work of the group, and the events supported by them are run in accordance with the Authority's equalities policies.

10. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS

- 10.1 Consultation with the Portfolio Holder, Cllr Tricia Gibbs, has taken place, but further discussion with the Partnerships and elected Members will be required as these future funding proposals are to be presented and agreed.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 That Cabinet approve the proposal to ensure greater parity in funding for Town Centre Partnerships commencing in April 2007.
- 11.2 That Cabinet approve the proposal to provide additional budgetary resource in order to increase support to the Partnerships in the short term and note the reduction in growth bid RG9 of £2,085 in year one.
- 11.3 That Cabinet approve the proposal to reduce funding in the longer term encouraging other sources of funding to be sought.

12. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 12.1 To establish a more equitable method for each Town Centre Partnership to secure funding from NHDC.
- 12.2 To substantiate the estimated growth proposed within the Service and Financial Planning proposals for 2007/2008.
- 12.3 To ensure that Town Centre Partnerships are fully aware of the Authority's intention to withdraw funding at the end of 2013.

13. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

- 13.1 None

14. APPENDICES

- 14.1 None

15. CONTACT OFFICERS

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**TITLE OF REPORT: MARKETS – POLICY FOR FUTURE MANAGEMENT
ARRANGEMENTS**
REPORT OF THE HEAD OF LEISURE & ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

This report was under preparation at the time the agenda went to print and will be published as soon as possible.

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