

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 April 2008
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*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT	AGENDA ITEM No. 8
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TITLE OF REPORT: QUESTIONS

The following are responses to questions raised by Councillor Paul Clark at the meeting of the Committee held on 22 January 2008.

(A) Plastics Recycling

“Given that our recycled newspapers go to Aylesford and our garden waste to Cumberlow Green, where does our plastic recycling go and what is it used for?”

Response provided by the Head of Leisure & Environmental Services:

“All plastic waste is collected via our contractor Recresco and taken to Mansfield in Nottinghamshire where is it processed and made into plastic park / on-street furniture, posts, bollards etc.”

(B) In-Vessel Composting - costs

“How much financially is being put aside to publicise the change to the brown bin scheme to allow food waste to be include, when the in-vessel composting arrangement have finally been sorted?”

Response provided by the Head of Leisure & Environmental Services:

“Publicity for the move to include In-vessel composting within our collection arrangements will need to be contained within present budgets.”

(C) Change to Bin Collections

“In advising residents of the change to the bin collections in the District what percentage of household across the district were advised of this change?”

Response provided by the Head of Leisure & Environmental Services:

“All district residents should have received the publicity DVD, Booklet and collection calendar. There was extensive communication through local newspapers, Outlook magazine and via broadcast media.”

(D) Collection of recycling Items from Flats and Houses of Multiple Occupation

“What arrangements have been put in place and at what cost to collect recycling items from Flats and Houses of Multiple Occupation?”

Response provided by the Head of Leisure & Environmental Services:

“Recycling from flats and multiple occupancy dwellings is currently being investigated by the waste services team to determine the best methodology. Once the options and costs have been produced the option that provides best value will be selected.”

(E) Arcade Toilets, Hitchin - Lack of dedicated toilets for women

“What evidence base did this Council use to justify the lack of a dedicated Toilet Provision for Women in the new refurbished Arcade toilets in Hitchin?”

Response provided by the Head of Leisure & Environmental Services:

“The refurbished toilets at the Arcade have been designed to enable greater access for more people. The nature of the unisex design is one that is being used in many new public conveniences. The old style of toilets with males and female split can encourage anti social behaviour, which is difficult to manage. The new design ensure each cubicle is separate, therefore, reduces the level of anti social behaviour, enables parents to supervise their children easier which ensures better management control.

The male only facilities are restricted to gender because they consist of urinals only. Based on specialist research the configuration of toilets provided has been designed to maximising the opportunities available to all users and restrict waiting times.

Although the Council has received some complaints regarding the new toilets, we have also received a similar amount of compliments.

The British Toilet Association is Britain’s leading organisation that is representative of many local authorities and the private sector that as an interest in public toilets. Their web site is: www.britloos.co.uk

One of the main suppliers that have a linked web site is www.interpublicurbansystems.co.uk/home.htm

Although NHDC have not used their products, there web site illustrates the changes from the old to the new ways of provision. All examples, show unisex provision with direct access and separate male urinals.”

(F) Arcade Toilets, Hitchin – Health and Safety

“What Health & Safety audit was conduct by this Council prior to the decision to install door opening on to a public through fare at the new toilet facility in the Arcade in Hitchin?”

Response provided by the Head of Leisure & Environmental Services:

“Many factors were taken into consideration regarding the design and style of new toilet provision at the arcade toilets. One of the main factors is the design and size of the facilities was to improve customer safety and accessibility. Most of the modern designs that are currently being used to replace public toilets have toilet doors opening outwards.

We believe that the new facilities incorporates good design principles and are far safer and accessible for the public than the old.”

(G) Hitchin Town Hall – Market Testing

At the Committee meeting on 22 January 2008, Members regretted that precise cost information regarding officer time spent on the Hitchin Town Hall Market Testing exercise was not available, but asked that officers report back to the Committee with an indicative estimate of such costs.

A response is awaited from the Heads of Community Development & Cultural Services and Financial Services.

The following is a response to a question raised by Councillor David Billing at the meeting of the Committee held on 22 January 2008.

(H) Area Visioning

"Please could we be updated as to the continuance of the work of the various Visioning Groups. In particular, when did each of them last meet formally, when were their Action Plans last updated, how many of their intended projects which were due to be completed by December 2007 were completed and how many still are unfinished, what is the total (aggregated for all years to date) of the budgets (revenue and capital) for each which have been spent to date, and what budgets remain unspent?"

Response provided by the Head of Community Development & Cultural Services:

1. Visioning Funding

The Area Visioning programme was time limited to four years April 2002 – March 2006. The budget allocation each year was £50,000 revenue, allocated on a pro-rata demographic basis. The capital allocation was £375,000 As of 30.01.08, the budget position is:

Revenue Budgets

Area Committee	Allocation	Committed (not spent)	Spent	Unallocated
Letchworth	55,570	11,354	39,867	4,410
Hitchin	59,850	3,010	56,840	0
Baldock	34,210	1,053	33,157	0
Royston	17,709	1,493	16,216	0
S. Rural	35,405	5,910	29,495	0

Capital Budgets

Area Committee	Allocation	Committed (not spent)	Spent	Unallocated
Letchworth	120,100	75,232	28,000	16,355
Hitchin	112,600	110,350	0	2,250
Baldock	75,000	75,000	75,000	0
Royston	62,700	62,700	0	0
S. Rural	79,600	41,900	5,000	32,700

2. Area Work Programmes

Each Area Committee did develop a three year work programme, based on the initial visioning consultation. These programmes were last formally reviewed during November to February 2005/6. Thereafter, all the outstanding projects that were deemed achievable were transferred to the Area Committee report / budget process.

Monitoring of progress on these issues is now carried out at Area Committee meetings, via the Champion News and Delegated Budget reports.

As part of the implementation of the new Sustainable Community Strategy, consideration is being given to refreshing the work programme approach for Area Committees.

3. Visioning Groups

Each Area Committee developed its own approach to visioning and not all set up specific visioning groups.

Baldock

The original visioning group became the Baldock Bypass Consultation Group which evolved into the Town Centre Stakeholder Consultation Group that meets periodically to address Town Centre Developments and the Town Partnership Group that meets monthly to look at initiatives of raising the Town's profile with regards to business and tourism.

Revenue commitments and expenditure:

Consultants for Land associated to By-Pass £23,400
Streetscene Improvements (HH funding) £14,000
Town Centre Conservation Area £1,275
Tree Works £4,500

Capital commitments and expenditure:

Feasibility study for new railings £15,000
Two CCTV cameras £60,000

Hitchin

Established 3 local visioning groups – Youth, Transport and Planning.

The last formal meeting of the Planning Group was in June 2006 and there remain a number of outstanding issues, eg: Churchgate.

The 2020 Transport Vision for Hitchin was presented to Hitchin Area Committee in March 2007 by the Visioning Transport Sub Committee.

The Youth Visioning Group became the Voice of Hitchin Youth and still meets on a regular basis.

Revenue commitments and expenditure:

Woodside Screening £10,544
Town Centre Strategy £927

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Visioning Presentations £443
BMX Dirt Bike Track £1,372
Tree Planting Butts Close £1,500
Voice of Hitchin Youth £1,500
Churchgate Project £2,635
Community Centre leaflet £700
Cabbies Hut, Market Place £1,300
Community Centres Leaflet £700

Capital commitments and expenditure:

Refurbishment/rebuild of Bancroft Hall (£67,500) & improvements to Windmill Hill (£42,850).

Southern Rural

No specific visioning group has met. There were visioning representatives pre 2003 who fed in to the overarching Visioning document. To develop the Rural Strategy (2004/5), a Rural Members Group and multi-agency Strategic Rural Partnership Group were established, but these have not met since 2006.

All Parish Councils/Parish Meetings are consulted on many district wide issues/strategies and there is an annual Rural Parish and Town Council Conference.

Revenue commitments and expenditure:

Reduce vandalism in Breachwood Green, St Ippolyts and Kimpton £3,000
Drugs and alcohol project for young people £500
Anti fly tipping measures £2,000
Produce Village Halls booklet £1,350
Rural detached outreach youth provision £6,000

Capital commitment and expenditure:

SCooTS 2 Wheels Scheme £15,000.

Letchworth

The original visioning group was wound up as a result of the evolving a Town Council and the Letchworth Town Centre Partnership.

Revenue commitments & expenditure:

The Grange Improvement Forum £500
The Grange Youth Club £10,190
Jackman's Youth Initiatives £6,263
Street Tree Planting £5,000
Letchworth Youth Council £2,000

Capital commitments & expenditure:

New Youth Facility within the proposed Ivel Court development £30,000
The Grange Community Garden Project £45,745
Letchworth Open Air Pool – enhancement works £28,000

Royston

Set up one visioning group of about 11 people, ranging from 15 to 80 plus.

Revenue commitments and expenditure:

Young People's events £4,000
Bus stop seating £1,400
Royston Town Council – East of England £2,000
Youth Council £790

Capital commitments and expenditure:

£62,700 to transport related projects.

4. Outstanding Projects

Other than those listed below, all projects identified through visioning are either completed, ongoing or mainstreamed.

Baldock

The Area Committee committed the remaining revenue balances of the visioning programme to the future Town Centre enhancements £2,470 (this was area committee visioning, not main visioning)

Letchworth

Unallocated capital funds of £16,355 are being proposed for a range of projects associated with Norton Common .

Youth Activities Wilbury Area £5,000

S. Rural

Revenue visioning - £1k project for volunteers yet to complete, £4,150 agreed (£3,368 yet to allocate) in support of Parish Plans, £990 underspend against Village Halls Networking events as project now completed. Awaiting re-allocated project

Capital visioning - £32,700 yet to allocate on other projects.”

The following questions have been submitted by Councillor Martin Stears.

(I) Social Inclusion Strategy

“On 15 March 2005 Cabinet recommended to Council that a more detailed Social Inclusion Action Plan is prepared following consultation with partner agencies, the Local Strategic Partnership and Area Committees prior to submission back to Cabinet later in 2005.

The recommendation was accepted by Council on 26 April 2005. Could you please explain what actions have taken place following this?”

The question has been referred to the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement and Rural Affairs for a response.

(J) Slippage of strategic reports to Cabinet

"In view of the slippage of a number of strategy reports to Cabinet, is sufficient attention being given to prioritising the strategic management of the authority to ensure that leading officers and elected Members are able to make their contributions?"

The question has been referred to the Chief Executive for a response.

(K) Graffiti removal standards

"How well is the authority meeting its standards for the removal of graffiti and are these standards sufficiently challenging to meet the aspirations of residents?"

The question has been referred to the Head of Leisure & Environmental Services for a response.

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