

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES

Meeting of the Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Gernon Road, Letchworth on Thursday, 1 March 2007 at 7.30pm

PRESENT: *Councillors Mrs C.P.A. Strong (Chairman), A. Bardett (Vice-Chairman), Mrs A.G. Ashley, D.J. Barnard, Liz Beardwell, David Billing, Judi Billing, John Bishop, Simon Bloxham, Tom Brindley, P.C.W. Burt, Paul Clark, J.M. Cunningham, Melissa Davey, Fiona Hill, Jane Gray, T.W. Hone, A.F. Hunter, R.E. Inwood, Sal Jarvis, S.K. Jarvis, David Kearns, Lorna Kercher, Joan Kirby, Marilyn Kirkland, I.J. Knighton, David Levett, Bernard Lovewell, H.M. Marshall, D. Miller, M.R.M. Muir, Elliot Needham, Mrs L.A. Needham, Lawrence Oliver, M. Paterson, Diane Proudlove, R.L. Shakespeare-Smith, F.J. Smith, R.A.C. Thake, M.E. Weeks and Sarah Wren.*

IN ATTENDANCE: *Chief Executive, Strategic Director of Customer Services, Strategic Director of Financial & Regulatory Services, Head of Financial Services, Democratic Services Manager and Senior Committee and Member Services Officer.*

104. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Monica Bloxham, Tricia Gibbs, Gary Grindal, Martin Stears and A.D. Young.

105. MINUTES

It was moved by Councillor F.J. Smith, seconded by Councillor T.W. Hone, and

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meetings of the Council held on 18 January 2007 and 8 February 2007 be approved as true records and signed by the Chairman.

106. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

No additional items were presented for consideration by the Council.

107. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

108. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Risk Management Presentation

The Chairman announced there was to be a Risk Management presentation from Fiona Timms (Risk Manager) for all Members in the Council Chamber at the conclusion of the Council meeting.

109. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No items were presented for consideration by the Council under public participation.

110. COUNCIL TAX RESOLUTION 2007/08

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance reminded Members that the Council, at its meeting held on 8 February 2007, had approved a 2007/08 Council Tax increase of 4.9% for North Herts. At that meeting, the Council had been unable to formally approve the Council Tax resolution because it had not been notified of the Hertfordshire County Council and Hertfordshire Police Authority precept requirements for 2007/08.

Members had been provided with the Council's Estimates Book for 2007/08, which contained the statements of the Leader of the Council and the Portfolio Holder for Finance, the schedule of potential Council Tax levels 2007/08, the General Fund Summary, Area Committee Budgets, Directorate Budgets, the Capital Estimates and the Manpower Salary Budget.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance reported that the Hertfordshire County Council precept had been set at a level which equated to a Council Tax of £1.034.13 for a Band D property, which was 4.99% higher than the Council Tax for the current year. The precept for the Hertfordshire Police Authority was set at a level which equated to a Council Tax of £130.17 for a Band D property, which was 4.99% higher than the current year.

The effect of the Council's decision made at its meeting on 8 February 2007, coupled with the County Council and Police Authority precepts, resulted in a Band D Council Tax of £1,342.68, an increase of 4.98%. This charge would be increased by the appropriate parish precepts, as detailed in the agenda papers.

It was moved by Councillor T.W. Hone, and seconded by Councillor F.J.Smith, that the Council Tax resolution for 2007/08, as detailed in agenda item 7, be approved.

An amendment was moved by Councillor Lawrence Oliver, and seconded by Councillor Paul Clark, to add in a sixth recommendation "that noting that both the level of the Council Tax and the rate of increase amongst the highest in Hertfordshire, the Council instructs the Cabinet to pursue vigorously a programme of reduction in the Council's overhead cost to ensure that this is not repeated in future years".

On advice from the Strategic Director of Financial & Regulatory Services that the Council Tax resolution needed to be in the precise format as prescribed by law, and that the proposed amendment would be more appropriate had it been moved at the 8 February 2007 Budget Council meeting, the Chairman ruled that the amendment would not be considered by the meeting.

Upon the original motion being put to the vote, it was

RESOLVED:

1. That the following, as submitted in the 2007/2008 Estimates book, be approved:-
 - a) The revised revenue estimates for 2006/2007 and the revenue estimates for 2007/2008.
 - b) The revised capital programme for 2006/2007 and the capital programme for 2007/2008 are subject to adequate resources being available.
 - c) The manpower salary estimates for 2007/2008.
2. That it be noted that at its meeting on 19th December 2006 the Cabinet calculated the amount 48,432.5 as its council tax base for the year 2007/2008 in accordance with regulation 3 of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992 made under Section 33(5) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
 - a) 48,432.5 being the amount calculated by the Council, in accordance with Regulation 3 of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992, as its council tax base for the year.

b)

Council		Council	
Parish/Town	Tax Base	Parish/Town	Tax Base
Ashwell	818.8	Letchworth	12,130.90
Barkway	362.9	Lilley	169.30
Barley	325.9	Nuthampstead	71.90
Bygrave	123.10	Offley	571.30
Caldecote and Newnham	49.80	Pirton	537.10
Clothall	80.20	Preston	183.50
Codicote	1,564.10	Radwell	44.90
Graveley	1,996.10	Reed	143.00
Hexton	64.40	Rushden and Wallington	194.50
Hinxworth	152.30	St. Ippolyts	915.10
Holwell	150.20	St. Pauls Walden	561.70
Ickleford	770.30	Sandon	230.10
Kelshall	79.60	Therfield	250.20
Kimpton	1,019.20	Weston	428.80
Kings Walden	432.80	Wymondley	426.00
Knebworth	1,935.60	Royston	6,077.10
Langley	85.90		

being the amounts calculated by the Council, in accordance with Regulation 6 of the Regulations, as the amounts of its council tax base for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which one or more special items relate.

3. That the following amounts be now calculated by the Council for 2007/2008 in accordance with Sections 32 to 36 of the Local Government and Finance Act 1992:-
- a) £59,182,103 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 32(2)(a) to (e) of the Act.
 - b) £42,072,100 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 32(3)(a) to (c) of the Act.
 - c) £17,110,003 being the amount by which the aggregate at 3(a) above exceeds the aggregate at 3(b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 32(4) of the Act, as its budget requirement for the year.

- d) £7,559,423 being the aggregate of the sums which the Council estimates will be payable for the year into its general fund in respect of redistributed non-domestic rates, revenue support grant, increased by the amount of any sums which the Council estimates will be transferred from its collection fund to its general fund in accordance with Section 97(3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 and increased by the amount of any sum which the Council estimates will be transferred from its collection fund to its general fund pursuant to the directions under Section 98(4) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 made on 6th February 1996.
- e) £197.19 being the amount at 3(c) above less the amount at 3(d) above, all divided by the amount at 2(a) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 33(1) of the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year.
- f) £911,185 being the aggregate amount of all special items referred to in Section 34 (1) of the Act.
- g) £178.38 being the amount at 3(e) above less the result given by dividing the amount at 3(f) above by the amount at 2(a) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no special item relates.
- h)

Parish/Town	Parish Precept		Total
	Basic		
	£	£	£
Ashwell	178.38	58.62	237.00
Barkway	178.38	31.41	209.79
Barley	178.38	32.22	210.60
Bygrave	178.38	42.24	220.62
Caldecote & Newnham	178.38	12.05	190.43
Clothall	178.38	19.64	198.02
Codicote	178.38	57.60	235.98
Graveley	178.38	7.38	185.76
Hinxworth	178.38	68.09	246.47
Holwell	178.38	43.14	221.52
Ickleford	178.38	46.09	224.47
Kelshall	178.38	31.41	209.79
Kimpton	178.38	51.36	229.74

Kings Walden	178.38	41.59	219.97
Knebworth	178.38	49.08	227.46
Letchworth	178.38	16.07	194.45
Lilley	178.38	23.39	201.77
Offley	178.38	31.51	209.89
Pirton	178.38	43.75	222.13
Preston	178.38	43.87	222.25
Radwell	178.38	14.92	193.30
Reed	178.38	17.13	195.51
Rushden & Wallington	178.38	19.43	197.81
St. Ippolyts	178.38	15.63	194.01
St. Pauls Walden	178.38	49.17	227.55
Sandon	178.38	29.12	207.50
Therfield	178.38	19.98	198.36
Weston	178.38	27.64	206.02
Wymondley	178.38	42.25	220.63
Royston	178.38	27.97	206.35

being the amounts given by adding to the amount at 3(g) above the amounts of the special item or items relating to dwellings in those parts of the Council's area mentioned above divided in each case by the amount at 2(b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(3) of the Act, as the basic amounts of its council tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which one or more special items relate.

(i)

Parish/Town	Valuation Bands							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Ashwell	158.00	184.34	210.66	237.00	289.66	342.34	395.00	474.00
Baldock	118.92	138.74	158.56	178.38	218.02	257.66	297.30	356.76
Barkway	139.86	163.18	186.47	209.79	256.40	303.04	349.65	419.58
Barley	140.40	163.81	187.19	210.60	257.39	304.21	351.00	421.20
Bygrave	147.08	171.60	196.10	220.62	269.64	318.68	367.70	441.24
Caldecote and Newnham	126.95	148.12	169.26	190.43	232.74	275.07	317.38	380.86
Clothall	132.01	154.02	176.01	198.02	242.02	286.04	330.03	396.04
Codicote	157.32	183.55	209.75	235.98	288.41	340.87	393.30	471.96

Graveley	123.84	144.49	165.11	185.76	227.03	268.33	309.60	371.52
Hexton	118.92	138.74	158.56	178.38	218.02	257.66	297.30	356.76
Hinxworth	164.31	191.71	219.08	246.47	301.23	356.02	410.78	492.94
Hitchin	118.92	138.74	158.56	178.38	218.02	257.66	297.30	356.76
Holwell	147.68	172.30	196.90	221.52	270.74	319.98	369.20	443.04
Ickleford	149.65	174.59	199.52	224.47	274.35	324.24	374.12	448.94
Kelshall	139.86	163.18	186.47	209.79	256.40	303.04	349.65	419.58
Kimpton	153.16	178.69	204.21	229.74	280.79	331.85	382.90	459.48
Kings Walden	146.65	171.09	195.52	219.97	268.85	317.74	366.62	439.94
Knebworth	151.64	176.92	202.18	227.46	278.00	328.56	379.10	454.92
Langley	118.92	138.74	158.56	178.38	218.02	257.66	297.30	356.76
Letchworth	129.63	151.25	172.84	194.45	237.65	280.88	324.08	388.90
Lilley	134.51	156.94	179.34	201.77	246.60	291.45	336.28	403.54
Nuthampstead	118.92	138.74	158.56	178.38	218.02	257.66	297.30	356.76
Offley	139.93	163.25	186.56	209.89	256.53	303.18	349.82	419.78
Pirton	148.09	172.77	197.44	222.13	271.49	320.86	370.22	444.26
Preston	148.17	172.87	197.55	222.25	271.63	321.03	370.42	444.50
Radwell	128.87	150.35	171.82	193.30	236.25	279.22	322.17	386.60
Reed	130.34	152.07	173.78	195.51	238.95	282.41	325.85	391.02
Royston	137.57	160.50	183.42	206.35	252.20	298.07	343.92	412.70
Rushden and Wallington	131.87	153.86	175.82	197.81	241.76	285.73	329.68	395.62
St. Ippolyts	129.34	150.90	172.45	194.01	237.12	280.24	323.35	388.02
St. Pauls Walden	151.70	176.99	202.26	227.55	278.11	328.69	379.25	455.10
Sandon	138.33	161.40	184.44	207.50	253.60	299.73	345.83	415.00
Therfield	132.24	154.29	176.31	198.36	242.43	286.53	330.60	396.72
Weston	137.35	160.24	183.12	206.02	251.80	297.59	343.37	412.04
Wymondley	147.09	171.61	196.11	220.63	269.65	318.69	367.72	441.26

being the amounts given by multiplying the amounts at 3(g) and 3(h) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in valuation band D, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 36(l) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands.

4. That it be noted that for 2007/2008 Hertfordshire County Council and the Hertfordshire Police Authority have stated the following amounts in precepts issued to the Council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:-

		Valuation Bands							
Precepting Authority		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
		£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Hertfordshire County Council	County	689.4	804.3	919.2	1034.	1263.94	1493.7	1723.5	2068.2
Hertfordshire Police Authority	Police	86.78	101.2	115.7	130.1	159.10	188.02	216.95	260.34

5. That, having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at 3(i) and 4 above, the Council, in accordance with Section 30(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the following amounts as the amounts of council tax for 2007/2008 for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:-

List of parishes and tax at different bands (County, Police, District and Parish)

		Valuation Bands							
Parish/Town		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
		£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Ashwell		934.20	1,089.90	1,245.60	1,401.30	1,712.70	2,024.10	2,335.50	2,802.60
Baldock		895.12	1,044.30	1,193.50	1,342.68	1,641.06	1,939.42	2,237.80	2,685.36
Barkway		916.06	1,068.74	1,221.41	1,374.09	1,679.44	1,984.80	2,290.15	2,748.18
Barley		916.60	1,069.37	1,222.13	1,374.90	1,680.43	1,985.97	2,291.50	2,749.80
Bygrave		923.28	1,077.16	1,231.04	1,384.92	1,692.68	2,000.44	2,308.20	2,769.84
Caldecote and Newnham		903.15	1,053.68	1,204.20	1,354.73	1,655.78	1,956.83	2,257.88	2,709.46
Clothall		908.21	1,059.58	1,210.95	1,362.32	1,665.06	1,967.80	2,270.53	2,724.64
Codicote		933.52	1,089.11	1,244.69	1,400.28	1,711.45	2,022.63	2,333.80	2,800.56
Graveley		900.04	1,050.05	1,200.05	1,350.06	1,650.07	1,950.09	2,250.10	2,700.12
Hexton		895.12	1,044.30	1,193.50	1,342.68	1,641.06	1,939.42	2,237.80	2,685.36
Hinxworth		940.51	1,097.27	1,254.02	1,410.77	1,724.27	2,037.78	2,351.28	2,821.54
Hitchin		895.12	1,044.30	1,193.50	1,342.68	1,641.06	1,939.42	2,237.80	2,685.36
Holwell		923.88	1,077.86	1,231.84	1,385.82	1,693.78	2,001.74	2,309.70	2,771.64
Ickleford		925.85	1,080.15	1,234.46	1,388.77	1,697.39	2,006.00	2,314.62	2,777.54
Kelshall		916.06	1,068.74	1,221.41	1,374.09	1,679.44	1,984.80	2,290.15	2,748.18

Kimpton	929.36	1,084.25	1,239.15	1,394.04	1,703.83	2,013.61	2,323.40	2,788.08
Kings Walden	922.85	1,076.65	1,230.46	1,384.27	1,691.89	1,999.50	2,307.12	2,768.54
Knebworth	927.84	1,082.48	1,237.12	1,391.76	1,701.04	2,010.32	2,319.60	2,783.52
Langley	895.12	1,044.30	1,193.50	1,342.68	1,641.06	1,939.42	2,237.80	2,685.36
Letchworth	905.83	1,056.81	1,207.78	1,358.75	1,660.69	1,962.64	2,264.58	2,717.50
Lilley	910.71	1,062.50	1,214.28	1,366.07	1,669.64	1,973.21	2,276.78	2,732.14
Nuthampstead	895.12	1,044.30	1,193.50	1,342.68	1,641.06	1,939.42	2,237.80	2,685.36
Offley	916.13	1,068.81	1,221.50	1,374.19	1,679.57	1,984.94	2,290.32	2,748.38
Pirton	924.29	1,078.33	1,232.38	1,386.43	1,694.53	2,002.62	2,310.72	2,772.86
Preston	924.37	1,078.43	1,232.49	1,386.55	1,694.67	2,002.79	2,310.92	2,773.10
Radwell	905.07	1,055.91	1,206.76	1,357.60	1,659.29	1,960.98	2,262.67	2,715.20
Reed	906.54	1,057.63	1,208.72	1,359.81	1,661.99	1,964.17	2,266.35	2,719.62
Royston	913.77	1,066.06	1,218.36	1,370.65	1,675.24	1,979.83	2,284.42	2,741.30
Rushden and Wallington	908.07	1,059.42	1,210.76	1,362.11	1,664.80	1,967.49	2,270.18	2,724.22
St. Ippolyts	905.54	1,056.46	1,207.39	1,358.31	1,660.16	1,962.00	2,263.85	2,716.62
St. Pauls Walden	927.90	1,082.55	1,237.20	1,391.85	1,701.15	2,010.45	2,319.75	2,783.70
Sandon	914.53	1,066.96	1,219.38	1,371.80	1,676.64	1,981.49	2,286.33	2,743.60
Therfield	908.44	1,059.85	1,211.25	1,362.66	1,665.47	1,968.29	2,271.10	2,725.32
Weston	913.55	1,065.80	1,218.06	1,370.32	1,674.84	1,979.35	2,283.87	2,740.64
Wymondley	923.29	1,077.17	1,231.05	1,384.93	1,692.69	2,000.45	2,308.22	2,769.86

111. ELECTIONS 2007/08 – SCALE OF FEES AND CHARGES

The Chief Executive and Returning Officer submitted a report setting out the proposed Scale of Fees and Charges for the Elections to be held during the 2007/08 Financial Year. The following documents were appended to the report:

Appendix A – Proposed Scale of Fees and Charges 2007/08;
Appendix B – Scale of Fees and Charges 2006/07.

It was moved by Councillor F.J. Smith, seconded by Councillor David Kearns, and

RESOLVED: That the Scale of Fees and Charges for the employment of additional staff to assist the Returning Officer in conducting District, Town and Parish Elections held during the Financial Year 2007/08, as set out at Appendix A to the report, be approved.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Council to set a Scale of Fees and Charges for Elections to be held during 2007/08.

112. ITEM REFERRED FROM CABINET – 27 FEBRUARY 2007 – THE ADOPTION OF A STATEMENT OF ENFORCEMENT POLICY AND PRACTICE FOR THE HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICE

The Council considered the minute of the meeting of Cabinet held on 27 February 2007, in respect of a proposed Statement of Enforcement Policy and Practice for the Housing and Environmental Health Service (Minute 173 refers). A copy of the report considered by Cabinet was included with the agenda, as were the following appendices:

Appendix A – List of consultees and summary of responses;

Appendix B – Proposed Statement of Enforcement Policy and Practice for the Housing & Environmental Health Service.

It was moved by Councillor Sarah Wren, seconded by Councillor Mrs L.A. Needham, and

RESOLVED: That the proposed Statement of Enforcement Policy and Practice for the Housing and Environmental Health Service, as detailed in Appendix B to the report, be adopted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To draw together a number of existing policy documents in order to assist in the outturn of Best Value and Local Performance Indicators.

113. ITEM REFERRED FROM CABINET – 27 FEBRUARY 2007 – POLICY FOR THE DETERMINATION OF WHAT REPRESENTS REASONABLE ENQUIRIES IN THE SEARCH FOR APPROPRIATE PERSONS UNDER PART 2A OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ACT 1990

The Council considered the minute of the meeting of Cabinet held on 27 February 2007, in respect of a proposed policy concerning reasonable enquiries to identify “Appropriate Persons” with regard to the implementation of the Contaminated Land Regime as imposed by Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (Minute 174 refers). A copy of the report considered by Cabinet was included with the agenda, as was the following appendix:

Appendix A – Proposed Policy – “Statement of Policy regarding Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act 1990: Reasonable enquiries in connection with the identification of Appropriate Persons”.

It was moved by Councillor Sarah Wren, seconded by Councillor Mrs L.A. Needham, and

RESOLVED: That the policy for the determination of what represents reasonable enquiries in the search for appropriate persons under Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, as detailed at Appendix A to the report, be adopted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure that the resources being expended in relation to the Council’s statutory duty to investigate and remediate contaminated land are proportionate and do not entail excessive cost.

114. ITEM REFERRED FROM CABINET – 27 FEBRUARY 2007 – POLICY FOR THE WAIVING OR REDUCING THE COSTS OF REMEDIATION FOR CLASS B PERSONS WHO ARE OWNER-OCCUPIERS OF RESIDENTIAL DWELLINGS UNDER PART 2A OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ACT 1990

The Council considered the minute of the meeting of Cabinet held on 27 February 2007, in respect of a proposed policy concerning the waiving or reducing the costs of contamination remediation works, for Class B persons, that arise as a result of the application of Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (Minute 175 refers). A copy of the report considered by Cabinet was included with the agenda, as was the following appendix:

Appendix A – Proposed Policy – “Statement of Policy regarding Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act 1990: Waiving or reducing of the cost of remediation for Class B Persons Owner-occupiers of residential dwellings”.

It was moved by Councillor Sarah Wren, seconded by Councillor Mrs L.A. Needham, and

RESOLVED: That the policy for the waiving or reduction of remediation costs for Class B owner-occupiers of residential dwellings under Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, as detailed at Appendix A to the report, be adopted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure that the resources being expended by the Council in fulfilling its statutory duties in relation to contaminated land are managed effectively.

115. ITEM REFERRED FROM CABINET – 27 FEBRUARY 2007 – TREASURY MANAGEMENT

The Council considered the minute of the meeting of Cabinet held on 27 February 2007, in respect of the proposed Treasury Strategy 2007/08 (Minute 180 refers). A copy of the report considered by Cabinet was included with the agenda, as were the following appendices:

Appendix A – Treasury Management Policy Statement;
Appendix B – Treasury Management Practices;
Appendix C – Treasury Strategy Statement.

It was moved by Councillor T.W. Hone, seconded by Councillor F.J. Smith, and

RESOLVED: That the Treasury Strategy for 2007/08, as set out at Appendix C to the report, be adopted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To comply with CIPFA's Code of Practice on Treasury Management.

116. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

(A) Cessation of Bus Subsidies

In accordance with Standing Order 10.4(a), the following question had been submitted by Councillor S.K. Jarvis to Councillor F.J. Smith (Leader of the Council):

“In the light of the Council’s welcome decision to sign the Nottingham Declaration, what steps have been taken to determine the effect that the decision to end subsidies for bus services will have on the carbon emissions in North Hertfordshire?”

The Leader of the Council replied that, whilst there was evident commitment for the Authority to contribute to climate change, it should be noted that the final decision of Council to sign up to the Nottingham Declaration was taken a little time after this proposal for cessation of subsidies was originally made, and therefore an exercise on carbon reduction impact did not take place. However, Members should be pleased to note that the report on the Nottingham Declaration contained the recommendation that the anticipated effect of any such proposal made by Officers or Members henceforth should be considered carefully in terms of its effect on North Herts’ carbon footprint.

The original basis for the Council supporting the cost of contracted bus services was to provide a relatively small, discretionary contribution to those services that could not be run on a commercial basis. Since deregulation of the bus network, and especially over recent years, the number of commercial service reductions and cost of bus contracts generally had resulted in the Council’s relatively small contribution escalating to a level that was unlikely to be sustainable given that funding bus services was not a legal or financial responsibility of this Council. The provision of

bus services had always been the responsibility of, firstly, commercial operators and, secondly, the County Council.

Furthermore, it should be noted that as the Council was now funding the cost of bus travel in full for elderly and disabled people within the county. The overall financial contribution of the Council towards supporting bus travel had almost doubled from 2005/06 to 2006/07. In the current financial year the Council was funding both contracted services (c£130,000) as well as concessionary fares (c£850,000). The concessions cost was likely to increase again in 2008/09 when the free-fare concession for elderly and disabled people became a national scheme.

However, it was worth noting that the decision of this Council to reduce its rate of subsidy would only remove 25% of the overall funding for contracted services, the remaining commercial services and funding provided by the County Council and other grant funding would still allow the majority of the network to be retained. The County Council would negotiate with operators to establish how its '75%' of funding may be used to gain the most effective use of contracted services. This may well identify efficiencies previously not considered.

The County Council had advised the Council of its intention to consult on the future of the bus network in Hertfordshire. This would provide the opportunity to investigate those bus services which are less well used during an evening or on Sundays, which by nature of their low passenger figures could essentially be contributing to higher carbon emissions than the opportunity to share a car journey, or taxi for instance, albeit the latter alternative was potentially more expensive. It should also be noted that despite the existing subsidy scheme, passenger numbers had not increased significantly in response to any reduction in fares or concessions.

If Hertfordshire did not introduce any further policies aimed at changing passenger transport use behaviour, then between 2005 to 2020 it was projected there would be an increase in use of some 17%, a growth rate of 1.1%. There were many opportunities for increasing bus use based on promoting greater reliability for buses on the road network, especially at peak times. These network management and infrastructure issues were matters for the County Council and were not affected by the financial decision of this Council.

It was estimated that the increase in efficiency of both cars and buses would bring about a 6% reduction in the ecological footprint from 2005 levels. The ecological footprint for passenger transport in Hertfordshire was already high, and a further increase of 17% was of concern. A target to encourage alternatives from the car was already in place, but the Local Transport Plan for Herts did already include a significant amount (£32 Million out of £44 Million predicted spend) on new road construction and maintenance to cater for the anticipated increase in car ownership.

This demonstrated that the issue of bus versus car usage cannot be analysed in isolation and a number of other measures must be considered to reduce the carbon footprint for the district in the longer term, including car sharing schemes, home working/shopping, better public transport scheduling and information.

These would be considered within the development of the Council's Climate Change Strategy in due course. However, it should be noted that the Council was already undertaking a number of activities which contributed to the reduction of carbon emissions and increased energy efficiency. The Leader of the Council gave examples of such activities.

(B) Hitchin Town Hall

In accordance with Standing Order 10.4(a), the following question had been submitted by Councillor Paul Clark to Councillor T.W. Hone (Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance):

"Would the Finance Portfolio Holder advise Council why a letter advising hirers that bookings made for Hitchin Town Hall after 1st October 2007 are to only be provisional as confirmed in a letter sent to regular users of the Hall by this Council, if as stated by

him to the chamber at the last Council meeting the Invitation to Tender was only a market testing exercise?”

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance had referred this matter to the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement & Rural Affairs who, in view of her absence, had prepared a response to the question which had been circulated at the meeting.

Councillor Clark asked the following supplementary question:

“What is the difference between market testing and the tendering process, and if it is market testing then what is next, a tendering process?”

The Chairman of the Council stated that the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement & Rural Affairs would provide a written answer to the supplementary question, and circulate this via the Members’ Information Service.

117. NOTICE OF MOTIONS

No notice of motions had been submitted by Members.

The meeting closed at 8.15pm.

.....

Chairman