

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

**BALDOCK and DISTRICT COMMITTEE
(Baldock, Arbury and Weston and Sandon Wards)**

**Meeting held in the Main Hall, Hartsfield JMI School, Clothall Road, Baldock
on 19 November 2007 at 7.30 p.m.**

MINUTES

PRESENT: *Councillors A.D. Young (Chairman), M.R.M Muir (Vice-Chairman),
S.K. Jarvis, Marilyn Kirkland, I.J. Knighton and M.E. Weeks.*

IN ATTENDANCE: *Barrie Jones (Head of Financial Services)
Louise Symes (Planning Projects Manager)
Helen Leitch (Urban Designer)
Terry Nickolls (Building Control)
Steve Geach (Parks and Countryside Development Manager)
Stuart Izzard (Senior Community Development Officer)
Susanne Gow (Committee and Member Services Officer).*

ALSO PRESENT: *Sanjay Patel (Hertfordshire Highways)
Mehron Kirk (Building Design Partnerships)*

19 members of the public.

45. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

46. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

47. MINUTES – 17 SEPTEMBER 2007

RESOLVED: that the Minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2007 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

48. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

There was no notification of any other business to this Committee Meeting.

49. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at this meeting.

50. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no items presented under public participation.

51. BALDOCK TOWN CENTRE ENHANCEMENT SCHEME – CATEGORY B ISSUES

The North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) Planning Projects Manager (PPM) introduced this item. She explained that Building Design Partnerships and officers from NHDC have been working closely together, and held meetings with Baldock Town Partnership, who had also contributed to the report about to be given.

The PPM explained that the report would be given in two distinct parts:

1. First, Mehron Kirk from BDP would give a presentation on the next stages of the process, with any amendments and fine tuning that has been necessary;
2. Sanjay Patel from Hertfordshire Highways (HH) would clarify the process with regards to Traffic Regulation Orders and suggested plans to alleviate congestion while the Baldock Town Enhancement was in progress.

This would be followed by an explanation of the next steps to be taken.

The representative from Building Design Partnerships gave a presentation of the final design proposals and the next stages in the project programme. His presentation covered the call for tenders and contracts to be awarded; the method of building which would begin in Spring 2008 (completion was scheduled for Spring 2009); the retention of the design on Masterplan at Appendix 1; the 2hr waiting period for perpendicular parking on the High Street which would be extended; a suggestion for a new cycleway/shared pedestrian route, to be used by children riding to and from school, running from the Mansfield Road side of the High Street via Pepper Alley across to the Simpson Drive side, and then connecting to local schools and the residential area. It was explained that the plans had been altered to include the Whitehorse Street/Station Road junction in the Enhancement Scheme. There were 163 long stay parking bays in Baldock, along with five taxi bays, six bus stops and seven loading bays.

The BDP representative continued by showing the Baldock Committee the street furniture that had been selected for Baldock, benches, recycling bins and litter bins in oak with metal liners, metal bollards and street lighting at two levels – higher on the carriageway and lower on the pavements. There would be new trees, lawn areas and bulbs planted. The slip road opposite Tesco would have its surface raised to the level of the pavement, and bollards installed so that it would be a pedestrian walkway, when not used for loading; two parking bays in the High Street would be extended.

The Baldock and District Committee questioned the BDP representative concerning the width and the safety of the proposed cycleway/pedestrian route crossing the High Street, and remarked that extra parking resources will be required once the new 2hr waiting period is introduced. Other queries and discussions covered whether the street furniture would be fire retardant, the link to Tesco, the location of pedestrian crossings and of long stay and possibly “time free” parking, the number of taxi bays needed in Baldock, the type of trees to be planted in the High Street, the small car park at the Baldock Community Centre and the loading bays to be situated on the new pedestrian walkway at the top of Church Street, and whether this space can also be used for tables and chairs in the good weather for food and drink from the nearby public houses. As a result of the discussions, it was decided that only three taxi bays were required, instead of five, and that trees other than lime could be planted in the High Street, although there was a known species of lime that did not drop pollen/sap. The BDP representative confirmed that the project was currently running according to the planned timescale, and that as 15% of the budget was allocated for consultants, this was also on target. It was stated that Hertfordshire Highways (HH) had put in additional funds for the Scheme to be delivered, and the Chairman thanked them for their co-operation in this matter.

A Committee Member pointed out that there is a spot on the east of Baldock High Street where three more car parking spaces can be inserted. The BDP representative said that this would be examined with a view to increasing car parking in Baldock.

The Hertfordshire Highways officer then demonstrated from Appendix 5, the plans for the Letchworth Road/Weston Way junction, which would give no entry into Hopewell Road there, would help to control traffic into Baldock and ensure that the bypass was the preferred route, making Baldock safer for both cyclists and pedestrians and ensuring a smoother and safer drop off and pick up of Knights Templar school children. With reference to Icknield Way and Football Close and their severe traffic problems, it was proposed to put an island and a No Right Turn sign in North Road, to prevent the use of Icknield Way as a rat run. A No Left Turn for vehicles over 7.5 tonnes into Sun Street was also proposed so that large vehicles would have to use the Baldock bypass.

Discussion then ensued, covering the traffic lights at Weston Way, the use of sensors to clear waiting traffic, whether the railway station would open up some of its car parking spaces for town centre shoppers, and the suggestion for a No Right Turn from Royston into North Road towards the AIM. The Herts Highways officer will look at this last proposition and report back to the Baldock and District Committee at a future date. The question of siting public conveniences near the Community Centre will also be

brought back to the Baldock and District Committee at a future meeting.

The HH officer confirmed that the points he raised will be implemented well before work begins on the Baldock Town Centre Enhancement in April 2008, to help alleviate traffic congestion and make travel easier and safer for residents of Baldock, visitors and through traffic.

The Chairman thanked the Hertfordshire Highways officer for his presentation and the answers to the many questions put to him.

The Chairman then thanked the representative of Building Design Partnerships and the Planning Control Officers for the Baldock and District Town Centre Enhancement Scheme, which had taken into consideration the majority of residents' and stakeholders' views, and he was confident that on completion of the project, Baldock would turn out to be a showcase town in North Hertfordshire.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Public Realm Implementation Plan ref: (90)LP011_B at Appendix 1 to the report be agreed by the Committee;
- 2) That the Committee unanimously agreed the next stages in the project programme set out in Appendix 2 to the report;
- 3) That the Committee unanimously agreed the proposals for the following Category B items:
 - (i) The slip road as set out in para 5.1.3 of the report
 - (ii) The parking strategy and extent of parking controls as set out in Section 5.2 and shown on Plan ref: (90)LP005_G at Appendix 3 to the report, and that this be subject to:
 - parking from 8am to 6pm
 - a reduction of taxi bays
 - parking at the Community Centre and
 - parking on the east side of Baldock High Street.
 - (iii) The traffic management gating proposals for the junctions at Whitehorse Street/Station Road and at Letchworth Road/Weston Way, as set out in section 5.5 of the report
 - (iv) The traffic management proposals for the Hopewell Road and Icknield Way areas as set out in 5.6 of the report
 - (v) The HGV restrictions at the Whitehorse Street/Station Road junction, as set out in para 5.7.5 of the report, and that consideration be given to a No Right Turn from the Royston Road.
- 4) That the Committee note the on-going work associated with:
 - (i) Baldock Station car park
 - (ii) Link to Tesco
 - (iii) Public conveniences
 - (iv) Land ownership issuesand that officers keep the Committee informed on progress through regular update reports.

REASON FOR DECISIONS:

Agreement of the final design will allow the final contract tender documents to be issued, thereby keeping the project to programme.

52. NHDC TREE STRATEGY

The Parks and Countryside Development Manager (PCDM) submitted a report from the Head of Leisure and Environmental Services on a Draft Tree Strategy for the Baldock and District Committee to examine, before making known their views on its adoption. It was suggested that this strategy would ensure the future maintenance of the tree stock owned or managed by North Hertfordshire District Council.

The aims of the Strategy were given as:

- a) Provide a basis to perpetuate the character of towns and other areas and provide for a continuity of the local treescape by establishing a tree population with a balanced age structure and diverse species mix.
- b) Allow the identification, quantification and evaluation of the Council's trees resource.
- c) Enable the preparation and execution of maintenance regimes and the prioritising and programming of a periodic maintenance or conservation works appropriate to the nature of each site. The Council's legal obligations would also be met more effectively, as would resistance to claims for damage or negligence.
- d) Improve the service to the general public. By increasing proactive maintenance and prudent replacement, trees would cause less danger, damage and nuisance thus reducing complaints, claims for damage and emergency situations.
- e) Enable the true cost of maintaining the Council's tree stock in a responsible manner to be established and allow realistic annual estimates to be compiled. Initial costs could increase significantly, but in the longer term as the health and condition of the tree stock improves, subsequent maintenance costs should reduce.
- f) Make the general public aware of the Strategy by appropriate publicity, thereby projecting the Council as an environmentally responsible body. Generally encourage and educate people not only to appreciate trees but also understand the reasons and need for tree renewal.
- g) Establish a more positive form of tree management which would allow both Council Members and its officers to deal with representations from the public, which may conflict with the views of others, in a firm, fair and more orderly manner.

The Committee asked the PCDM questions covering such matters as adoption of a two-for-one tree replacement policy; Tree Preservation Orders for privately-owned trees; and whether the Tree Strategy will be conveyed to Parish Councils. It was also suggested that the organisations who took part in tree planting on the railway embankment should be made known.

RESOLVED: That the Baldock and District Committee approve the recommendation to Cabinet of the NHDC Tree Strategy with the addition of the following conditions:

- That the Baldock Committee expressed their unanimous support for the objectives detailed in the NHDC Tree Strategy;
- That a two for one tree replacement policy should be adopted;
- That the description of the newly planted woodland at North Road should include an acknowledgement of the charitable bodies that planted them.

BALDOCK AND DISTRICT (19.11.07)

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

To provide sustainable working practices to best meet customer expectations for the maintenance and development of trees under North Hertfordshire District Council's ownership and management.

53. SERVICE AND FINANCIAL PLANNING 2008-2013 – EFFICIENCIES AND INVESTMENTS 2008-2009

The Head of Financial Services gave a brief introduction to the report he had submitted to the Baldock and District Committee on the proposed efficiencies and investment items in the Financial Year 2008-2009. After taking account of the Committee's comments, he planned to convey these to Cabinet on 18 December 2007.

The Committee questioned Mr Jones on various points, and expressed the opinion that the proposal to reduce Area Committees is very unwelcome, as they fund certain local projects which would otherwise be overlooked.

They also saw the reduction of the post of Principal Conservation Officer as a retrograde step, and this was discussed by Members. The Head of Financial Services was asked if this could be looked at in more detail, so that Members could see clearly whether the same level of service could be given with lower funding and resources. Also covered in the discussion was whether redundancy payments were counted in the budgets, and this was confirmed. The deletion of the Handyperson/Security Scheme was thought a valuable scheme that was worth saving, at its loss would have a large impact on the residents whom it affected.

The Members agreed that alternative funding should be researched before the Scheme ends.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Financial Services on behalf of the Baldock and District Committee and suggested that their comments be noted.

RESOLVED: That the views of the Baldock and District Committee be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION:

- 1) To ensure that all Members are consulted on the proposed savings and growth bids and afforded the opportunity to comment before Cabinet sets the Draft Budget on 18 December 2007;
- 2) To ensure that the Council is able to adjust its base expenditure downwards to narrow the gap between the 2008/2009 District Requirement figure, as adjusted for anticipated capping limits, and service spending requirements.

54. CHAMPION NEWS

The Senior Community Development Officer introduced Claire Morgan, who will be sharing the duties of CDO for Baldock with him in the future.

Baldock Town Hall Feasibility Study

The Town Hall Community Group continued to receive help from NHDC officers and draft proposals regarding possible future use for the building had been drawn up. A follow up meeting with the Group was to be arranged to discuss the initial proposals and to help with applications for external funding sources, including the East of England Development Agency (EEDA). Plans were being made to hold a small drama festival based in the Town Hall in the summer of 2008.

Baldock Town Partnership

The Baldock Town Partnership felt that their priorities and some of the readily deliverable projects should be clearly defined and that this would also raise Baldock's profile. It was agreed that a database of local businesses should be built in order to distribute to those businesses promotional literature about the Baldock Town Partnership. The Partnership last met on Tuesday 13 November 2007 at Tesco.

Baldock Chartered Street Fair – 2 to 6 October 2007

This year's Chartered Street Fair visited the Town and operated as usual for three consecutive nights. There were minimal public order issues, and care was taken to inform the residents of Pepper Court that access to their properties would occur and that the disruption would be kept to a minimum.

North Hertfordshire District Council officers, representatives from Building Design Partnerships, the Town Centre Enhancement design consultants, and Abbott's Amusements have held joint discussions regarding the proposed design features and programme of works for the Chartered Street Fair in 2008. Specific attention was paid to the Fair's occupation of the main space along the High Street, and areas in Whitehorse Street, Bell Row Sun Street and Simpson Drive.

Councillor M. Weeks recorded thanks on behalf of the Committee to the SCDO for his efforts to ensure that the Chartered Street Fair had run smoothly.

Clothall Village Hall

Although the project group had secured over £164,000 of external funding towards the associated site works and rebuilding of a new village hall, and despite also having applied to National Lottery, Biffa and other grant-making charitable trust funds, they still continued to seek possible funding sources for the project relating to new CO₂ emission regulations on new build projects.

Baldock Bowls & Social Club

The Senior Community Development Officer (SCDO), together with other officers of the Council, continued to assist the Club in developing a Community Amateur Sports Association to address the future management of the site.

The Senior Community Development Officer (SCDO) was to assist with the formal opening of the newly-refurbished multi-use sports area at Avenue Park on 27 November, and it was arranged for the Baldock Crusaders, the resident Ladies Netball Club at Avenue Park, to receive Naida Hutchinson, a current England Ladies A team player, to publicly open the courts and help to raise the profile and development of netball in the area.

Ashwell United Reform Church Hall and Ashwell Village Hall

The Senior Community Development Officer and Community Facilities Manager have visited both sites with regard to Parish Amenity Capital Improvement Fund (PACIF) grant funding.

The work on Ashwell Village Hall has been completed, and final arrangements for the release of the remaining grant have been made.

Ashwell URC Hall management group has applied for the current year's PACIF grant round, and officers are helping with the analysis of contractors' estimates for the proposed refurbishment works.

Weston Parish Council, Village Hall

The Senior Community Development Officer and the Community Facilities Manager helped and advised the Parish Council and Village Hall Management Group in looking at possible options available to finance initiatives relating to Village Hall provision.

Clothall Common – Community Initiatives and Environmental Projects

Works continued on the environmental projects and initiatives raised at the 2006 Community Open Evening.

Countryside Management Services gave advice on some planting and biodiversity projects for the area, and Hertfordshire Highways considered final landscape softening works associated with the Baldock By-Pass.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee endorsed the actions taken by the Senior Community Development Officer to promote greater community capacity and wellbeing

REASON FOR DECISION:

To allow the Committee to enforce the actions and policies involved in the tasks and projects undertaken by the Senior Community Development Officer.

55. BALDOCK AND DISTRICT AREA COMMITTEE DEVELOPMENT AND AREA VISIONING BUDGETS 2007/2008

The Senior Community Development Officer (SCDO) tabled a grant application for determination at the Meeting: for funding support towards building a tennis and football changing facility at the Recreation Ground in Weston.

Members were asked to note the information in Appendix 1, which related to Area Committee Budget balances for the Financial Year 2007/08, the pre-allocations carried forward from 2006/07, and the balances allocated to Visioning Budgets available to respective wards within the Baldock and District area.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the budgetary expenditure, current balances and carry forwards from the Ward Development Budgets 2006/07, the Small Area Grants Budget and the allocated Area Visioning Budgets be noted;
- (2) That the pre-allocations of uncommitted Ward Development Discretionary Funds to respective projects and initiatives within each Ward Budget be noted.
- (3) That the Baldock and District Committee notes and acknowledges the amounts of uncommitted Ward Development Discretionary Funds within each respective Ward Budget and considers the allocation of those funds to projects and initiatives.
- (4) That £1,700 from the Weston and Sandon Ward Development Discretionary Budget is allocated by the Baldock and District Committee to help fund the construction of a Tennis and Football changing facility in Weston, co-ordinated by the Parish Council.

REASON FOR DECISIONS

To use the allocation of funds that are available and accessed by various members of the community to improve the services provided by the local organisations and groups.

56. GRANT APPLICATION – WESTON PARISH COUNCIL

RESOLVED: That the sum of £1,700 from the Weston and Sandon Ward Discretionary Development Budgets be approved to go towards the provision of a fully-serviced pavilion on the Weston Recreation Ground, for the use of all sporting groups currently using the area and visitors to the play area.

REASON FOR DECISION

The allocation of funds would improve the services provided by the local organisations and groups that are available and accessed by various members of the community.

The Senior Community Development Officer asked Committee Members to inform him if there were any further projects within their Wards which required funding, as these were needed before the end of the Financial Year 2007/2008. He reminded the Committee that it was essential to allocate any currently unallocated sums before they were lost or used elsewhere.

The meeting closed at 9.57p.m.

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Chairman