

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

ROYSTON AND DISTRICT COMMITTEE
(Royston and Ermine Ward – Parishes of Barkway, Barley, Kelshall, Nuthampstead,
Reed and Therfield)

**Meeting held at Royston Town Hall, Melbourn Street, Royston
on 26 September 2007 at 7.30p.m.**

MINUTES

PRESENT: *Councillors: Mrs F.R. Hill (Chairman), Mrs Liz Beardwell, P.C.W. Burt, A.F. Hunter and F.J. Smith.*

IN ATTENDANCE: *Alan Fleck - Community Development Officer,
David Miley – Democratic Services Manager
Louise Symes – Planning Projects Manager
Susanne Gow – Committee Administrator
Richard Tiffin – Area Planning Officer.*

ALSO PRESENT: *Royston Town Councillor Robert Smith
County Councillor Doug Drake
Michael Thrower – Chairman of the Steering Committee,
Royston Community Project Action Group
Andy Williams – The House, Royston
Martin Hempell - MVA Transport Consultancy
Stephen Sears – NHDC Parks, Grounds and Countryside*

37. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and stated that Item 9 on the Agenda, Royston Town Centre – Key Parking Issues, would be taken after Item 6, Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations.

The Chairman then introduced Richard Tiffin to the Committee as Royston's newly-appointed Area Planning Officer, North Herts District Council.

38. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Cllr H. Marshall. Councillor A. Hunter had notified the Chairman, with apologies, that he would arrive at the meeting late.

39. MINUTES – 18 July 2007

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Royston and District Committee Meeting held on 18 July 2007, be approved as a true record of the proceedings, and be signed by the Chairman.

Matters Arising from the Minutes

Somerfield, broken wall hazard – the Community Development Officer was disappointed to report that to date he had been unable to obtain an appointment to speak on the telephone with Somerfield's Property Manager in Bristol, to discuss with him repairs to the wall. He would continue in his attempts to make contact

Garden Walk – Hertfordshire Highways' estimate was £25,000 for works to include signs, repairing kerbstones, etc. It was the Committee's decision that an estimate should be sought only for the setting up, with appropriate signs, of a No Right Turn system for vehicles exiting Garden Walk onto Melbourn Road. It was hoped that this would provide a more realistic quotation.

40. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman announced that discussion on Bus Services in Royston would be admitted under this heading, but would be discussed as the final item on the Agenda (Item 12).

41. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Declarations of interest were made in respect of Item 7 by Councillors Beardwell, Hill and Hunter, as they were on the Planning Control Committee. They stated they would remain for the item and reserved the right to speak and vote.

Declarations of interest were made also by Councillors Beardwell and Inwood, who were both involved with the Royston Arts Festival (Item 11). They stated they would remain for the item and reserved the right to speak and vote.

42. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Royston Town Councillors Robert Smith and Rod Kennedy were due to speak on the subject of Royston Markets, but County Councillor Kennedy was not present. Councillor Robert Smith addressed the Royston and District Committee.

Councillor Robert Smith advised that the Royston Town Council (RTC) had put in a bid which included a Marketing Plan, to the North Herts District Council (NHDC) for Royston's Wednesday and Saturday markets, and had been informed on Monday 24 September that their bid had failed at the costing stage. He reported that RTC were very concerned for the future of the markets, as there appeared to be no way forward. He stated that RTC would like to alert the Royston and District Committee to what had happened, and asked that the Committee make known the views of RTC to NHDC and seek early clarification of their intentions. The ideal would be to revitalise the Royston markets.

Councillor Robert Smith was advised by several Members of the Committee, some of whom had been at the Royston Town Council Meeting, that the matter was still ongoing, and far from being resolved. The result of the tender bid would come to Cabinet via the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and E-Government, and Royston Town Council would then be notified of the outcome.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Smith for his presentation, and stated that the Committee supported his views.

43. REVIEWS OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS

The Democratic Services Manager submitted a report of the Returning Officer on the reviews of polling districts, polling places and polling stations required by the Electoral Administration Act 2006.

The report was presented in order that the Royston and District Committee could consider any appropriate revisions to the existing polling districts and polling places, and so they could express their views on the location of the polling places within the area. Considerations to be taken into account included: accessible and convenient polling stations; the size of the polling place; and to note that each parish or community should have their own polling place where possible.

The general opinion of the Royston and District Committee was that the only issue that could be improved during elections was to ensure that the electorate used the correct entrance to the polling station locations on Market Hill. A reminder was given that some of Royston's Wards are rural, and their needs should be considered as well as those voters in Royston Town.

However, as there were no better alternatives to these, and the rest of the polling districts, places and stations in Royston and District were satisfactory, the Members agreed that it was appropriate to accept the current arrangements.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the current scheme of polling districts and polling places within the area of the Committee be confirmed;
- 2) That comments relating to the location of the polling stations be relayed to the Returning Officer.

REASON FOR DECISIONS:

To enable the Council to review the Local Authority's polling districts and polling places.

44. YOUTH – ROYSTON COMMUNITY PROJECT: AN ALL-WEATHER SPORTS PITCH

Michael Thrower from the Royston Community Project Steering Committee gave a short oral presentation on the need in Royston for an all-weather sports pitch, and the part-funding required to commence detailed planning and construction.

In 2006 the Johnson Matthey Sports and Social Club donated £150,000 towards a Community Project to help fund an all-weather sports pitch to be used by football, hockey and rugby teams in Royston.

The most appropriate venues in Royston were thought to be Therfield Heath (although floodlighting there would be a problem), and Meridian School. The School sports field was new and therefore of a good standard, but planning permission would be required for the area on which the artificial turf is to be laid. As it was 170m away from the edge of the sports field, minimal noise and light pollution would reach nearby residents.

At the present time approximately 45 youth football teams shared the facilities in and around Royston. The Action Group went to the Football Association (FA) and Hertfordshire Football Association, and were informed that they allow competitive football to be played only on 3G AstroTurf, and they would support the all-weather pitch being laid at Meridian School, and contribute to the funding required if this was used. The site at the south-east corner of the new sports field was approved, and costs for an all-weather pitch to be shared by Meridian and Royston Town Football Club, surrounded by a 3m high fence, were likely to be £450,000.

No funding was available from England Hockey, who informed the Action Group that competitive hockey cannot be played on a 3G pitch, making the idea of Royston having a multi-use all-weather pitch impossible. At the present time Royston Hockey Club had to travel to Bassingbourn Barracks in Cambridgeshire to train and play matches. Due to security measures in place on entry to a military site, no supporters were able to travel with the teams. It was felt that the lack of facilities was severely restricting the development of hockey at junior and senior levels in Royston, and Meridian had to play all their fixtures away. The preferred site for Royston Hockey Club and Heath Sports was Therfield Heath, and the Conservators of Therfield Heath have pledged to help with funding. Estimated costs for developing this area for hockey, including an all-weather pitch with a 1.5m high fence were £350,000.

Royston Rugby Club required new youth changing facilities on Therfield Heath, which would be funded to the tune of £100k by the RFU if £20,000 could be raised by other means.

The decision, therefore, was made to progress on both the Meridian and Therfield Heath sites, and the Action Group will go to Sport England for additional funding. Outline drawings were currently being prepared by a consultant, environmental issues were to be addressed by a potential supplier, and further advice on planning and funding would be sought from local councils.

The sum of £150,000 offered by Johnson Matthey was for projects that are funded and have planning approval. If other funding (e.g. from NHDC and the FA) was available for football, the money would go to part-fund the hockey project, and if they did not require it all and £20,000 was available to Royston Rugby Club, they would be able to seek £100,000 from the RFU for the rugby changing facilities.

Mr Thrower concluded by stating that the support of local, District and County representatives was sought in fulfilling an obvious and urgent community need, and planning permission and seed funding were essential for the Action Group to approach Sport England, the Football Foundation and Conservators of Therfield Heath for the necessary funding.

The Chairman thanked Mr Thrower for his interesting presentation, and the Members discussed the points that he had raised. It was emphasised that planning permission should be sought as early as possible to secure funding, and the Councillors agreed to support the concept of having one or more general pitches in Royston. They commended Mr Thrower and his Committee for their hard work and dedication on behalf of the sportsmen and women (and children) of Royston.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Royston and District Committee agree in principle to support the Royston Community Project;
- 2) To urge proponents of the scheme to urgently seek planning permission for the proposed all-weather pitches;
- 3) To thank Mr Thrower and his Committee for their dedication and hard work for the people of Royston.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To allow the Royston and District Committee to continue with its support to local voluntary and community organisations and to further the aims and strategic priorities of North Herts District Council.

45. YOUTH – PLANS FOR FORMATION OF A ROYSTON YOUTH COUNCIL AND RELATED YOUTH ISSUES IN ROYSTON

The House

Andy Williams from The House, a youth drop-in centre in Royston, gave an oral presentation on the history of The House. He and his wife Viv set up a Christian café temporarily for three months in 2000 and young people gathered there as a place to meet with friends while being warm, safe and dry. In 2001 the Williams found premises in Market Hill, and the café was such a success with the young people of Royston as a meeting place, that in 2004 they formed a charity, the Open House Project, with a budget.

The House resembled a home for the young people, with pool tables, music, karaoke and table football. It was open to all 12 to 18-year-olds on Tuesdays, Saturdays and Sunday afternoons, but in the summer holidays it was open in either the evening or afternoon, six days a week. There were no set programmes, it was a place to relax and socialise or do activities available in safety, off the streets. No alcohol, smoking or drugs were allowed in the House, and bad behaviour was not allowed – the older children kept the younger, more boisterous ones in check and ensured that the adults who run the place were treated with respect. Strong relationships were formed between adults and young people based on good values, and advice was sought and given, as the adults were not close enough to the young people to be too involved. If required, the young people could be put in touch with experts who would be able to help them.

Detached youth workers were sent around Royston to contact any young people who were out on the streets, and could defuse any awkward situations in which they found themselves. The adults and detached youth workers liaised with the local Youth Protection Team and the Anti-Social Behaviour Officer, and all volunteers in contact with the children were CRB checked. The project was a success, and the House provided a valuable facility for the youth of Royston.

Youth Council

The Community Development Officer gave an oral presentation to the Royston and District Committee on the possible formation of a Youth Council.

Royston Town Council were very much in favour of such a proposal, but had reservations about the resourcing implications. They had agreed to form a sub-committee with representatives from The House and North Herts District Council to look at the whole issue, and this sub-committee was expected to meet soon. No prescriptive number was decided, but it was agreed that as many young people as wanted to would be involved, subject to manageability.

It was noted that during Citizenship classes which had been held during the summer by members of both Royston Town Council and Royston and District Committee, young people in the local schools had shown interest in participating in a Royston Youth Council and meeting together with the Councillors, and it was suggested that the children from the classes should be approached first to have the chance to be a member of the Youth Council.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That in principle the Royston and District Committee will do everything possible to encourage the project set up by Mr and Mrs Williams and their assistants at The House, Royston;
- 2) To thank Andy Williams for his interesting presentation and the dedication and hard work of himself and his wife and the Team at The House, for the young people of Royston. The Royston and District Committee endorse the valuable contribution that The House makes to the youth of Royston;
- 3) That the Royston and District Committee give their support to the setting up of a Youth Council in Royston.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

To support and encourage the youth of Royston.

46. ROYSTON TOWN CENTRE – KEY PARKING ISSUES

Martin Hempell from MVA Transport Consultancy presented the preliminary findings of the car parking and assessment study, recently carried out in Royston Town Centre.

Mr Hempell stated that the Parking Study and Strategy would inform the production of the Royston Town Centre Strategy. The study included car parking surveys, interviews with retail establishments, shoppers and station users. MVA also held stakeholder consultations and sent out postal questionnaires.

Results showed that in the Royston Town Centre car parks which included the Civic Centre car park, at any one time there was always spare capacity. Study of parking trends showed that all-day parking numbers were low, and the duration of parking in the Town Centre for the majority of car park users was less than one hour.

Mr Hempell stated that the Royston Car Parking Strategy had to conform with the Local Transport Plan and wider transport policy objectives, and to support the emerging Town Centre Strategy. The Car Parking Strategy should aim to contribute to the revitalisation of Royston Town Centre.

The need for additional off-street parking and whether an increase in on-street parking was desirable was examined, and the solution was that the existing level of parking provision should be maintained. The removal of parking charges from Town Centre car parks was not currently being considered, and it was noted that significant numbers of motorists were seeking spaces in free parking areas. The Royston Town Centre Manager proposed that in order to alleviate traffic density in Royston High Street, a 30 minute free public parking Order could be imposed in the High Street loading bays.

The Chairman thanked Mr Hempell for his presentation, which confirmed many of the points previously raised by the Committee.

Members questioned Mr Hempell about a proposed parking rebate scheme, the use of loading bays, and Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) in Newmarket Road. He said it was proposed that work would commence with the lengthening of the area of parking restrictions in both Newmarket Road and King James Way in an effort to increase road safety. Mr Hempell also agreed that the results of the MVA study showed no reason why these TROs should not be put in place if sufficient funding was available, and also that it was desirable that the loading bays in the High Street indicated by the Town Centre Manager should be released to be converted into short-term limited waiting parking.

Mr Hempell revealed that in Newmarket Road the plans were to put a 1-hour restriction in place both morning and afternoon, to stop long-term parking there. Consideration would be given to introducing Traffic Regulation Orders to put waiting restrictions in other roads in the area of Newmarket Road and King James Way, such as Hollies Close, Priory Close and Tall Trees.

Discussion included methods of ensuring that cars are parked in the car parks and not on-street, the introduction of pedestrianised areas and the suggested introduction of 1 hour's free parking in the Civic Centre car park.

The rebate scheme was commended, and it was hoped that the Chamber of Commerce would proceed with the introduction of the scheme and that the retailers would support this.

On being invited to speak by the Chairman, a Royston Town Councillor who has been a retailer in Royston, opined that the retailers of Royston would be supportive of a parking rebate scheme in Royston Town Centre.

RESOLVED:

- 1) To note the report of the Head of Planning and Building Control, together with the presentation by MVA Transport consultancy, in respect of the production of the Royston Town Centre Strategy.
- 2) To recommend that Royston and District Committee Members agree the amendments and additions of Traffic Regulation Orders subject to sufficient funding being available to progress these, and other identified schemes in the District. It is further recommended that the Committee request Cabinet to seek additional funding for the resourcing of Traffic Regulation Orders, in order that the remaining three schemes in Royston as mentioned in Section 4.3 of the report of the Head of Planning and Building Control can be implemented in the financial year 2007/2008.
- 3) To identify roads in which to introduce Traffic Regulation Orders in order to put in place short-term waiting restrictions.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To support the ongoing development of the Car Parking Strategy and, in the interim, to seek to address existing on-street parking issues in several streets.

47. CHAMPION NEWS

The Royston Community Development Officer (CDO) provided a review of his activities since the last meeting of the Royston and District Committee, held on 18 July 2007. This review covered reports on the last Community Surgery at Angel Pavement, events such as the Farmers' Market and Kite Festival, the inception meeting of the Royston Town Centre Strategy, the location of a plastics recycling point in Burns Road, and highways issues such as potholes, the turning régime proposed for Garden Walk, a suggested weight limit to be introduced in Melbourn Street and continued vehicle damage to a garden wall in Titchmarsh Road.

Members were informed that a second Youth Question Time will take place at Meridian School, Royston on 17 October 2007, following the success of the first Youth Question Time in Letchworth during the summer, which was attended by 90 young people.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee endorsed the actions taken by the Community Development Officer to promote greater community capacity and well-being.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To keep Members of the Royston and District Committee apprised of the work of the Community Development Officer and the latest developments in community activities in the Royston and District area.

48. AREA COMMITTEE DEVELOPMENT BUDGETS 2007/2008

The Community Development Officer (CDO) took the Committee through the Royston and District Budget Statement for 2007/2008, and advised the Committee that there was just one grant application for determination.

Members were requested to note the information in Appendix A, which related to Area Committee Budget balances for the Financial Year 2007/08, the pre-allocations and the balances allocated to Visioning Budgets available to respective wards within the Royston and District area.

RESOLVED: That the current expenditure and balance of the Area Committee Development Budgets be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To allow the Royston and District Committee to continue with its support to local voluntary and community organisations and to further the aims and strategic priorities of North Herts District Council.

49. GRANT APPLICATION – ROYSTON ARTS FESTIVAL

The Royston and District Committee examined the programme for the four-day Royston Arts Festival, copies of which had been supplied by the Community Development Officer, and unanimously expressed their appreciation for the efforts of the organisers. It is hoped that this Festival will be repeated in future years.

RESOLVED: That the Royston Arts Festival Committee be awarded £1,000 as a contribution to the costs of the Festival which consists of 24 events at locations throughout Royston, and which showcases the diversity of arts groups and activities within the Town.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To allow the Royston and District Committee to continue with its support to local voluntary and community organisations and events, and to further the aims and strategic priorities of North Herts District Council.

50. BUS SERVICES IN ROYSTON – TO RETAIN SERVICES

This item had been introduced by the Chairman under Notification of Other Business.

A letter from Royston Town Council had been received by the Chairman, asking for assistance to retain a local bus service, notably the No 16, which was to be cut as a consequence of loss of funding from North Herts District Council. This route is also a School Service, and is used by 1200 people per week, including the schoolchildren. Enquiries had revealed that to fully support this route would cost £50,000.

Discussions ensued, one suggestion being combining the No 16 with the No 17 route which carried 2000 passengers per week, and adjusting timings to save costs. A further suggestion was that when a new contract was set up, it should use Open Book Costing from the start, which ensured value for money.

Further negotiations were to be held between the Transport Policy Officer and the bus company, and the Community Development Officer would speak to Hertfordshire County Council to try and enlist their help to attract other funding.

It was proposed to continue negotiations with the bus company, with the possibility of support from the Royston and District Committee if a reasonable figure could be reached.

RESOLVED: That the Community Development Officer and Transport Policy Officer's assistance would be requested in the discussion of alternatives to removing a vital bus route, and efforts would be made to enlist the help of Hertfordshire County Council to attract other funding to maintain the existing bus route.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To allow the Royston and District Committee to continue with its support to the local residents of Royston and the local community through its efforts to maintain the efficiency and regularity of local transport.

51. COMMUNITY SURGERY

The Chairman reminded the Committee that the next Royston and District Community Surgery will be held on Saturday 6 October from 10am to 11.30am at Royston Town Hall, with Councillor H. Marshall and herself in attendance.

The meeting closed at 10.02p.m.

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Chairman