

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES

Meeting of the Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Gernon Road, Letchworth on Thursday, 29 March 2007 at 7.30pm

PRESENT: *Councillors Mrs C.P.A. Strong (Chairman), A. Bardett (Vice-Chairman), Mrs A.G. Ashley, 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, Tricia Gibbs, Jane Gray, T.W. Hone, A.F. Hunter, R.E. Inwood, S.K. Jarvis, David Kearns, 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, Deepak Sangha, R.L. Shakespeare-Smith, Derek Sheard, F.J. Smith, Martin Stears, R.A.C. Thake, M.E. Weeks, Sarah Wren and A.D. Young*

IN ATTENDANCE: *Chief Executive, Strategic Director of Customer Services, Strategic Director of Financial & Regulatory Services, Planning Control & Conservation Manager, Democratic Services Manager and Senior Committee and Member Services Officer, and 21 members of the public.*

118. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D.J. Barnard, Monica Bloxham, Gary Grindal, Sal Jarvis, Lorna Kercher, Lawrence McNamara and Diane Proudlove.

119. MINUTES

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

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 1 March 2007 be approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

120. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

No additional items were presented for consideration by the Council.

121. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

122. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

(1) Meeting with Railway Companies

At the Chairman's invitation, Councillor F.J. Smith (Leader of the Council) informed the Council that, together with the Chief Executive, Councillors David Billing, Steve Jarvis and Young and Oliver Heald MP and Peter Lilley MP, he had met with representatives from Network Rail and First Capital Connect to discuss potential changes to the railway timetables for stations in North Herts. Network Rail and First Capital Connect would be carrying out a consultation exercise on any potential changes during Summer 2007, although it was unlikely that there would be any major changes until at least May 2008 and maybe as late as December 2008. The Council would be kept informed of developments, but Councillor Smith hoped that as many Members as possible would respond directly to the railway companies as part of the consultation exercise.

(2) Simon Bowes-Lyon

The Chairman announced that Simon Bowes-Lyon would be shortly stepping down as Lord Lieutenant of Hertfordshire. The Council joined the Chairman in formally thanking Simon Bowes-Lyon for the work he had carried out during his time in office.

(3) Walsworth Festival

The Chairman announced that Councillor Shakespeare-Smith had circulated some raffle tickets relating to this summer's Walsworth Festival. If anyone wished to enter the raffle, they were asked to return the completed tickets, with payment, to Councillor Shakespeare-Smith.

(4) District Council Elections

The Chairman wished all those standing the very best of luck at the forthcoming District Council Elections.

123. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

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

124. HERTFORDSHIRE WASTE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Chairman of the Council invited Mr Richard Brown (Assistant Director, Environmental Management, Hertfordshire County Council) to give a presentation on the Hertfordshire Waste Management Strategy.

The points made by Mr Brown during his presentation included:

- 566,639 tonnes of municipal waste was collected in Hertfordshire in 2005/06.
- 33% was recycled or composted (national average 27%).
- This equated to 516 kgs per head of population (national average 530 kgs/head) or £22.79 per head (national average £27.25/head).
- Over £40 million was spent each year on collecting and disposing of household waste, and 60% of this waste was sent to landfill.
- The challenges facing the waste management service included meeting Best Value Performance Standards of exceeding 30% recycling in 2007/08; the Local area Agreement recycling and composting target of 41.5% in 2008/09; and the Hertfordshire recycling/composting target of 50% by 2012.
- Changes in the way that waste was dealt with was required due current landfill contracts running out between 2008 and 2010, with new landfill opportunities rapidly disappearing; the damage to the environment caused by landfill; and the increasing costs of landfill.
- The new Waste Strategy for Hertfordshire sought to reduce waste by further publicity campaigns, including the targeting of schools and businesses; and a range of incentives such as new home composting promotions and extension of the nappy cash-back scheme.
- The new Strategy aimed to tackle recycling by expanding kerbside waste collection services; restricting the amount of bin waste collected; and offering more facilities for composting mixed food waste, garden waste and cardboard. It was hoped to investigate methods for the treatment of non-recyclable waste, such as Mechanical Biological Treatment (MBT), Energy from Waste (EfW) and gasification/pyrolysis.

- Public Consultation on the new Waste Strategy would take place between January and March 2007, with the Hertfordshire Waste Partnership considering responses to the consultation in April/May and recommending adoption of the Strategy in June/July. Each partner authority would be requested to adopt the strategy during the summer of 2007.

After a period of questions and answers, the Chairman thanked Mr Brown for his presentation.

125. ITEM REFERRED FROM CABINET – 27 MARCH 2007 – AREA GOVERNANCE AND COSTS OF DEMOCRACY

The Council considered the minute of the meeting of Cabinet held on 27 March 2007, which aimed to conclude the outstanding issues on Area Governance and Costs of Democracy, following the extensive consultation exercise carried out in late 2006/early 2007 with the Scrutiny Committee, the Area Committees and Performance, Audit and Review Committee (PARC), together with issues raised at the All Member Workshop held on 6 February 2007 (Minute 194 refers). A copy of the report considered by Cabinet was included with the agenda, as were the following appendices:

Annex 1 - Cabinet Report 19 December 2006;

Annex 2 - Consultation with Area Committees – Summary of Responses;

Annex 3 - Development Control Committee – Proposed Arrangements;

Annex 4 - Draft Civic Calendar 2007/08.

The views of Cabinet in respect of the matter, together with the view of the Chairmen of the Area Committees, Scrutiny Committee and PARC, were set out in the referral.

An additional paper was tabled at the meeting, which detailed the amended financial implications in respect of the report, as a consequence of Cabinet's proposed recommendations to Council on the matter.

It was moved by Councillor Tricia Gibbs, and seconded by Councillor A.D. Young, that the recommendations contained in the referral from Cabinet be approved.

As an amendment, it was moved by Councillor S.K. Jarvis, and seconded by Councillor Paul Clark,

"That the second and third bullet points in Recommendation (2) be deleted and replaced with:

Area Committees shall maintain their present planning powers to ensure that decision making remains visible, accountable and effective as well as efficient. No change shall be made to the frequency of area committee meetings until after the Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Bill and any other changes arising from the Local Government White Paper have been introduced (or the measures dropped by the Government) and their impact assessed."

Following a full debate and, in accordance with Standing Order 16.5, Councillor Paul Clark asked for a recorded vote be taken on the amendment.

(Voting:

For: Councillors Liz Beardwell, David Billing, Judi Billing, Paul Clark, R.E. Inwood, S.K. Jarvis, David Kearns, Joan Kirby, Marilyn Kirkland, Lawrence Oliver, Deepak Sangha, Derek Sheard & Martin Stears – 13.

Against: Councillors Mrs A.G. Ashley, A. Bardett, John Bishop, Simon Bloxham, Tom Brindley, P.C.W. Burt, J.M. Cunningham, Melissa Davey, Tricia Gibbs, Jane Gray, Fiona Hill, T.W. Hone, A.F. Hunter, I.J. Knighton, David Levett, Bernard Lovewell, D. Miller, M.R.M. Muir, Elliot Needham, Mrs L.A. Needham, M. Paterson, R. Shakespeare-Smith, F.J. Smith, Mrs C.P.A. Strong, R.A.C. Thake, M.E. Weeks, Sarah Wren & A.D. Young – 28.

Abstention: Councillor H.M. Marshall – 1.

The amendment was lost.)

Following further debate upon the substantive motion, and upon being put to the vote, it was

RESOLVED:

- (1) That, in accordance with its duty to review Standing Orders and the Scheme of Delegation to Officers, Council endorses revisions to the Standing Orders and Scheme of Delegation to officers necessary to effect the changes in the report;
- (2) That, in accordance with the duty regarding the allocation of functions to Committees of the Council, the following be agreed:
 - A reduction in the number of regular Council, Cabinet, Scrutiny Committee and Performance, Audit & Review Committee meetings to six per year, and a review undertaken of their terms of reference;
 - The creation of a central Planning Control Committee;
 - A reduction in the number of regular Area Committees to six each per year, the make up of which be agreed between Committee/Democratic Services, Community Development Officers and each Area Committee Chairman, providing a balance between the business of Area Committees and their Community Engagement role;;
 - Cabinet and Committees of the Council no longer accept reports whose recommendations do not require decision from that meeting under the Scheme of Delegation;
 - Standing Orders be amended to reflect the reduction in the number of meetings;
 - The Head of Legal & Democratic Services prepare revisions to the Constitution to be submitted to the Annual Council meeting on 17 May 2007 for approval;
 - The revised structure be reviewed in 12 months' time.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure effective implementation of the new Area Governance and decision making arrangements.

126. ITEM REFERRED FROM CABINET – 27 MARCH 2007 – REGIONAL AND STRATEGIC PLANNING ISSUES – SAVED LOCAL PLAN POLICIES

The Council considered the minute of the meeting of Cabinet held on 27 March 2007, in respect of Regional and Strategic Planning Issues and, in particular, the issue regarding Saved Local Plan Policies (Minute 201 refers). A copy of the report considered by Cabinet was included with the agenda, as was the following appendix:

Appendix 1 – Schedule of policies to be saved from North Hertfordshire District Local Plan No. 2 with Alterations (April 2006).

Members were advised that the Schedule attached as Appendix 1 to the report was a matrix provided by the Government Office for the East of England for assessing whether to save policies from the existing Local Plan for a period beyond September 2007 or not. The spreadsheet had been filled in for all the policies of the existing Local Plan to indicate the opinion of North Hertfordshire District Council on which policies should be saved and which could be allowed to cease. The Full Council would be required to approve the schedule, but it would be a matter for the Secretary of States for Communities and Local Government to determine which policies would be actually saved.

It was moved by Councillor R.A.C. Thake, seconded by Councillor F.J. Smith, and

RESOLVED: That the schedule of Local Plan policies that will be presented to the Secretary of State for extension or non-extension, as set out at Appendix 1 to the report, be agreed for submission to Secretary of State, subject to any typographical amendments or other amendments which do not alter the general meaning of the document, which may be approved by the Head of Planning and Building Control, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning & Transport.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure that relevant planning policies are safeguarded until such time as the Local Development Framework Policies are adopted.

127. **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS**

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

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

“Whilst I was personally grateful for this Conservative Council for signing the Nottingham Declaration, would the Leader of the Council confirm how we are going to lead this district in cutting our CO2 emissions – not only in our own buildings, but in every household and industry in North Herts? We must save energy to solve the challenge of global warming.”

The Leader of the Council replied that, whilst the agreement to sign the Nottingham Declaration was reached quite recently, the authority was already undertaking a number of activities which in turn contributed to energy efficiency, increased recycling and, ultimately, reduced carbon emissions.

The Leader of the Council commented that these activities had included:

- Participation in the British Gas home insulation scheme, and resultant £50 reduction in Council Tax, advised to householders with their recent Council Tax Bills;
- Promotion of ‘Warm Front’, insulation and energy saving initiatives through the Environmental Health Department;
- Significant reduction in issue of committee papers to officers, by e-mailing reports and not printing unless absolutely necessary;
- The establishment of a ‘Green Issues’ staff group. This group had already investigated a number of initiatives including
 - the promotion of car sharing schemes for officers,
 - establishment of a ‘green’ intranet page promoting good practice,
 - Green initiatives/good practice to be included in the yellow development folder held by each officer,
 - Link to ‘Freecycle’ message board for recycling or sharing unwanted or surplus equipment and goods,
 - recycling of used stamps and envelopes, brochures/magazines,
 - purchasing goods and stationery with a greater proportion of recycled materials;
- The number of office based printers had already been reduced and further reductions would be considered;
- Replacement electrical goods were purchased with particular regard for their energy efficiency rating;
- Staff were encouraged to ensure that computers, monitors, printers and photocopiers were switched off (not left on standby) when leaving the office – this would, however, require periodic reminders as staff, and their locations, change. Lights should also be switched off, but as officers leave the cleaning staff and those attending evening meetings were often just arriving, so an element of caution needed to be used in terms of security and safety;
- The consolidation and alteration works required of the Authority in its move to single office accommodation would take into account the use of new energy and resource saving initiatives such as Geothermal heating, increased natural lighting, latest standards of insulation, push taps/dual flush cisterns for water saving, PIR

lighting in low use areas, plus the consolidation of administration/mailling/printing facilities to ensure that minimal stationery/equipment holdings were required;

- The use of mobile working for revenues and benefits officers had not only cut down the time it took to make claims, but required only one visit too, cutting down the visits to our central offices by a number of customers;
- The introduction of home working, which would be available to a number of Council officers, would cut down the amount of travel through the District and thus carbon emissions;
- The Council was also ensuring that contractors to the Authority also work in the most environmental manner possible, encouraging use of recycled materials where possible and energy efficient vehicles/equipment;
- The Council had encouraged the use of green transport through the Cycles to Work Scheme.

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Housing & Environmental Health (Councillor Sarah Wren) added the following comments with regard to the steps that the Council would be taking to encourage the community to participate in reducing carbon emissions:

- A climate change/green strategy would be developed for the authority. Having signed up to the Nottingham Declaration, the Council had a two year time slot in which to develop this strategy, but would of course build this into the work programme for 2008. This would allow recent policy proposals, such as the draft Climate Change Bill (released March 2007) and draft performance indicators proposals (released end of Summer 2007) to be considered and actions identified which contributed to achieving those aims;
- Any such strategy developed by the Council would also need to consider the policy implications of other aspects which may impact on carbon dioxide emissions either positively or negatively, such as the expansion of airports or provision of wind farms, and certainly be linked to planning position/land use commitments;
- In the meantime, the Council would continue to support ongoing green initiatives such as
 - the use of real or ecologically friendly nappies (as currently demonstrated on the Council's website),
 - establish stretching recycling targets as well as provide the facilities for North Herts residents to participate fully,
 - resource environmental fairs, commencing in Hitchin this summer,
 - promote the use of sustainable goods, recycling etc through the schools citizenship projects,
 - composting and wormery schemes for householders,
 - promotion of energy saving initiatives for business, currently under discussion with Stevenage Business Initiative, where one business' waste can be re-used by another,
 - promoting increased insulation in housing – the Council's housing stock survey has just been completed, which will help to inform its development of increased insulation,
 - consideration of green travel provision within the development and implementation of the Council's town centre, open space and leisure strategies,
 - encouraging development of eco-friendly housing in new building schemes,
 - encouraging re-use of 'silver' water in housing schemes by the use of reed bed technology (installed by one of the local housing associations for the cleansing of water used only for washing purposes).

Councillor Muir asked the following supplementary question:

“Trees take a lot of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Can the Council find land in the District to undertake a major tree planting programme?”

The Leader of the Council replied that the Council had always promoted the planting of new trees, and that it would be desirable to enhance the tree planting programme, in conjunction with Hertfordshire County Council.

128. NOTICE OF MOTIONS

(a) British Forces Free Postage Petition

Due notice having been given in accordance with Standing Order 11.1, it was moved by Councillor A.D. Young, seconded by Councillor F.J. Smith, and following debate, was

RESOLVED: That North Hertfordshire District Council is extremely concerned that service personnel on overseas duty can no longer receive parcels free of charge from family members resident in our district and across the UK, and that the Council agrees to write to the appropriate Minister, The Right Honourable Des Browne MP, Secretary of State for Defence, to offer support for the motion passed by Tewkesbury Borough Council and therefore to support the call for reinstatement of the free postal service as a matter of urgency. In addition, that the Council agrees to contact our Town and Parish Councils to encourage them to support this position and write to the Minister.

(b) Hitchin Town Hall

Due notice having been given in accordance with Standing Order 11.1, it was moved by Councillor Judi Billing, and seconded by Councillor Deepak Sangha,

“That following the publication of the Portfolio Holder’s statement on the Town Hall tender process on 14th March we call upon the council to suspend the process of disposal of the building currently being conducted under the heading of “market testing”

This suspension should be maintained until

- Legal opinion has been sought and published to all members concerning the circumstances in which a full tender process is not required for the disposal of an asset of this importance
- A full, open and public process of consultation with the people of the town and all user groups has taken place
- The considered views of Hitchin Committee have been sought and obtained
- An evaluation of the informal expressions of interest has taken place at representative member as well as officer level
- Members are involved in agreeing the full tender specification under which the town hall may be operated in the future
- Cabinet has publicly debated the disposal of Hitchin Town Hall in relation to the economic, social and environmental well-being of the town of Hitchin as well as its policy on asset disposal.”

Following a full debate and, in accordance with Standing Order 16.5, Councillor F.J. Smith asked for a recorded vote be taken on the motion.

(Voting:

For: Councillors Liz Beardwell, David Billing, Judi Billing, Paul Clark, R.E. Inwood, S.K. Jarvis, David Kearns, Joan Kirby, Marilyn Kirkland, Lawrence Oliver, Deepak Sangha, Derek Sheard & Martin Stears – 13.

Against: Councillors Mrs A.G. Ashley, A. Bardett, Simon Bloxham, Tom Brindley, P.C.W. Burt, J.M. Cunningham, Melissa Davey, Tricia Gibbs, Jane Gray, Fiona Hill, T.W. Hone, A.F. Hunter, I.J. Knighton, David Levett, Bernard Lovewell, H.M. Marshall, D. Miller, M.R.M. Muir, Elliot Needham, Mrs L.A. Needham, M. Paterson, R. Shakespeare-Smith, F.J. Smith, Mrs C.P.A. Strong, R.A.C. Thake, M.E. Weeks, Sarah Wren & A.D. Young – 28.

The motion was lost.)

(c) Conservation Areas

Due notice having been given in accordance with Standing Order 11.1, it was moved by Councillor David Billing, and seconded by Councillor Martin Stears,

“That the Council notes that the pace and pressure of development in our towns has increased considerably since the current cycle of Conservation Area Reviews started, and is set to increase further. This threatens some of our historic areas which are not yet given the protection of inclusion in a Conservation Area, in particular our Victorian and Edwardian heritage, which as time elapses we can see give a number of areas a character worth conserving.

Therefore, the Council, will by the end of this civic year, consider and publish a revised timetable for the review, for possible Conservation Area status, of such areas where there are sites under threat of demolition by developers. This will be based upon a rapidly completed risk analysis of such development pressures and this, and actions following from it, will take precedence over completing the present cycle of Conservation Area Reviews.”

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Planning & Transport commented that the pace of development in North Hertfordshire had been significant over the past 7 years or so, particularly since the Government published PPG3 on housing in 2000. Last year saw 591 new houses completed within the District, many of which were on sites in or around our historic town centres and at high densities that PPG3 advocated. He was pleased to see that the Government had finally recognised that prescribing minimum densities had significant impact in the type and form of development – and the Government would be withdrawing (with effect from 1st April) the Residential Density Direction 2000. He believed that “one size certainly did not fit all” regarding the type of development allowed – however the Council’s hands had been tightly tied !.

The Portfolio Holder had instructed Officers to undertake a thorough risk based assessment of the Conservation Area Review programme that would not only look at “threat of demolition”, but perhaps more importantly look at the real quality/character of the urban environment. The Council have had consultants looking at urban character assessments and this work had included extensive public consultation earlier in the year. The outputs would be in a format the Council could use by the end of May. The reappraisal of the Conservation Area Review programme would be completed within a month of the urban character work being available.

In the light of the Portfolio Holder’s response, the mover and seconder withdrew the motion.

(d) Waste Collection

Due notice having been given in accordance with Standing Order 11.1, it was moved by Councillor David Kearns, and seconded by Councillor Martin Stears,

“That this Council fully supports moves towards recycling as much household waste as possible, thereby allowing the collection of residual waste to be carried out on a fortnightly basis.

However, it recognises that it will not be possible to get the full support of residents until the doorstep collection of plastics and the in-vessel composting of kitchen waste have been put into place. It therefore agrees to suspend the introduction of fortnightly collections until these two conditions are met.”

As an amendment, it was moved by Councillor Mrs L.A Needham, and seconded by Councillor M. Paterson,

“That this Council fully supports moves towards recycling as much household waste as possible, thereby allowing the collection of residual waste to be carried out on an alternate weekly basis.

To achieve this we will continue to actively seek the co-operation of Hertfordshire County Council as the waste disposal authority, to make IVC available to further improve and extend recycling through the inclusion of kitchen waste.”

Following debate, and upon being put to the vote, this amendment was carried.

Councillor S.K. Jarvis had given notice of a further amendment that he wished to be considered in relation to this motion. However, in the light of the debate on the previous amendment, he withdrew his proposed further amendment.

The meeting closed at 11.00pm.

.....

Chairman