

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

**SOUTHERN RURAL COMMITTEE
(Cadwell, Chesfield, Codicote, Hitchwood, Offa & Hoo, Kimpton
and Knebworth Wards)**

**Minutes of the meeting held at The Council Offices, Letchworth Garden City on
Thursday, 31 July at 7.30 p.m.**

MINUTES

PRESENT: Councillors D.J. Barnard (Chairman), Tom Brindley (Vice-Chairman), Alan Bardett, John Bishop, Lee Downie, Tricia Gibbs, Sal Jarvis, David Miller and Mrs C.P.A. Strong.

IN ATTENDANCE: Patrick Candler – Head of Community Development and Cultural Services
Hilary Dineen – Committee and Member Services Officers.

Approximately 2 members of the public at commencement of meeting.

18. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jane Gray.

19. MINUTES – 12 JUNE 2008

Members noted that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2008 had not been reproduced in their entirety in the circulated agenda. Members agreed the minutes as correct providing a full copy was circulated to Members for scrutiny.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 12 June 2008 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.
- (2) That a full copy of the minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2008 be circulated to Members of the Committee.

20. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman confirmed that there would be no other items of business at this meeting.

21. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

- (1) The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting;
- (2) The Chairman advised that he had agreed to accept a discussion item about Post Office closures in the Southern Rural area as a matter of urgency. The reason for urgency was that the consultation period ended before the date of the next Southern Rural Committee meeting;
- (3) The Chairman reminded the Members that any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda, should be declared as either a prejudicial or personal interest and are required to notify the Chairman of the nature of any interest declared at the commencement of the relevant item on the agenda. Members declaring a prejudicial interest should leave the room and not seek to influence the decision during that particular item.

22. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – POST OFFICE CLOSURES

Councillor David Blundell thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to make a presentation to the Committee. He informed the Committee that he was speaking on behalf of St Ippolyts Parish Council. He stated that it would not be a good idea to close any Post Office within a Southern Rural Area and that St Ippolyts was in a particularly unique position for the following reasons:

- The data used to support closure of the St Ippolyts Post Office was misleading;

- The figures used to support closure were collated during 2006/07 which was a particularly bad period for this Post Office as the post mistress was seriously ill and the Post Office was closed for 2 weeks of the review period;
- Business had increased by 33% in 2006/2007 and a further 26.9% in 2007/08 after a new postmistress had taken over, with month on month increases continuing; the official data quoted a 22% population of retirement age, this was actually 35%;
- No account had been taken of the 2 very large care homes in the area;
- There was a large number of people with long term illness and disability in the area;
- The St Ippolyts Post Office served a wide area including Gossmore, Preston, Wymondley and people from Hitchin;
- The proposed alternatives of Highbury and Brookers were difficult to access for elderly, disabled and mothers with young children as access from Hitchin Town Centre included an uphill walk and the bus service from St Ippolyts to Hitchin ran only once every 2 hours;
- The suggested alternative of Highbury Post Office had official recorded usage of 4.14% where as the St Ippolyts official recorded usage was 7.97%, which would now be much increased;
- The Post Office was an important focus of village life, being the place many people met, and being regarded as the heart of the village.

RESOLVED: That Councillor Blundell be thanked for his informative presentation.

23. POST OFFICE CLOSURES

The Chairman introduced this discussion item. Members debated the issues around Post Office closures in general and particularly that of the St Ippolyts Post Office. Members were unanimous in opposing the closure of St Ippolyts Post Office as it was a vibrant active heart of the community. Discussion included that the consultation period was being held at a time when many decision makers were on holiday therefore effective protest was difficult and Members believed the consultation period should be extended; that the Council needed to respond to the consultation process and detail the benefits of each Post Office as to why they should not be closed; that there would appear to be no choices given in the consultation period as the number of closures required match exactly the number of Post Offices on the proposed closure list; that letters of objection should be sent to both Postwatch and the Consultation process; that as many people as possible register their objections to closures; that presentation of a business case to remain open should be given to the consultation process; that a representative from the Post Office be invited to a meeting of this Committee together with representatives from the relevant parishes; that proposed Post Office closures would not meet the strategic objectives of NHDC for example creating sustainable communities; that there was an environmental impact to any Post Office closure as car journeys would increase;

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Chairman contacts the Post Office to object to the limited and inappropriate period of consultation;
- (2) That the Chairman contacts the Post Office to request that the consultation period be extended to mid September 2008;
- (3) That a representative of the Post Office be invited to a meeting of this Committee to be convened at the earliest opportunity;
- (4) That all District Councillors and Parish Councillors be invited to any meeting convened to discuss Post Office closures;
- (5) That the designated Officer be requested to continue to investigate issues around Post Office closures.

REASON FOR DECISION: To support local sustainable communities within the North Hertfordshire District.

24. SOUTHERN RURAL COMMITTEE SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS – REVIEW OF 2006 – 2009 AND PROPOSALS FOR 2009 - 2012

The Head of Community Development and Cultural Services presented the report. He advised the Committee that Cabinet was in the process of reviewing centrally funded Service Level Agreements (SLA) and that all Area Committees were being asked to review the SLA that they fund. He informed the Committee that the Southern Rural Committee do not currently fund any SLA, but that this was the opportunity for the Committee to review other arrangements. The Head of Community Development and Cultural Services explained that SLA funding added weight to an organisation's requests for outside funding, that negotiations regarding any proposed new SLA would initially be with the Chairman, that funds allocated through an SLA will come from existing budgets.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the review of the local Service Level Agreements for 2006/09 be noted;
- (2) That the proposal to rebalance the funding of Service Level Agreements to reflect better the district wide/local area focus be noted;
- (3) That the Head of Community Development and Cultural Services be requested to circulate a list of any organisations which had been in receipt of regular funding from the Southern Rural Committee to inform any future discussion;
- (4) That the detailed negotiations with individual projects be conducted by relevant officers, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement and Rural Affairs and Committee Chairmen and Vice Chairmen;
- (5) That the Southern Rural Committee notes the proposed timescales for implementing the Service Level Agreements;
- (6) That the Head of Community Development and Cultural Services bring a further report to the Southern Rural Committee at the meeting to be held on 27 November 2008 as part of the Corporate Business Planning Process.

25. CHAMPION NEWS AND COMMUNITY REPORT

The Head of Community Development and Cultural Services updated the Committee on activities since the last meeting of the Southern Rural Area Committee held on 12 June 2008 and Members discussed various events. Particular attention was drawn to the following:

- That the drop-in sessions for PACIF held on 8 July 2008 went ahead with a number of groups being interested in submitting an application for grant funding;
- That the level of PACIF bids will be known by 30 September 2008;
- That the Head of Community Development and Cultural Services is working on a re-branding of PACIF and other rural grants for 2009/2010;
- That the Town and Parish Council Conference was a success and that Southern Rural Area Committee would have input into the next conference;
- That the Codicote Village Day, supported by grant funding from this Committee, was a great success and included a dance display from Codicote Youth Dance who had also received grant funding from this Committee;
- Codifest was also supported with grant funding and was a good day with an attendance of 3000 people;
- Knebworth festival was a great success and a news sheet showing photographs taken on the day was circulated to Members;
- Kimpton won Hertfordshire Village of the Year (West) and Pirton also received an award;
- That these successful and well attended activities show that NHDC involvement in the Community is of benefit.

RESOLVED: That the information provided by the Head of Community Development and Cultural Services on activities since the last meeting of the Southern Rural Committee held on 12 June 2008 be noted.

26. ANNUAL GRANTS, DEVELOPMENT, DISCRETIONARY AND VISIONING BUDGETS 2007-2008

The Head of Community Development and Cultural Services presented the report to the Committee, which set out the current expenditure and balances of the Area Committee delegated budgets. The Head of Community Development and Cultural Services also brought to the Committee's attention details of the recent request received for joint matched funding from North Hertfordshire Highways Partnership – Joint Member Panel.

Members debated the various requests for joint matched funding from North Hertfordshire Highways Partnership – Joint Member Panel including:

- That the A600 Ickleford to Stondon road surface had now been completed;
- The amount of funding that Parish Councils would be willing to allocate to any scheme;
- Council policy on funding of Highways repairs and improvements;
- That there was some risk involved in funding feasibility studies when funding might then not be available for any remedies suggested by the study;
- That if the full fifty percent matched funding is not committed from this Committee and/or Parish Councils then the schemes are not likely to take place;
- That Ward Budgets could be used to fund smaller schemes if the Ward Councillor was so minded;
- The Committee agreed that funding for each Parish would be as per the table below.

RESOLVED:

(1) That the budgetary expenditure, balances and carry forward items from the Ward Development Budgets and allocated Visioning budgets as set out at Appendix 1 be noted;

27. GRANT REQUEST – NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE HIGHWAYS – JOINT MEMBER PANEL – GRAVELEY PARISH

RESOLVED:

- (1) That a grant of £6300 be awarded to North Hertfordshire Highways – Joint Member Panel as fifty per cent joint matched funding for projects in Graveley Parish as detailed below, on condition that Graveley Parish Council provide funding of £1000;
- (2) That the provision of the grant funding already agreed does not imply that funding will be granted for work on 2009/2010.

PROJECTS IN GRAVELEY PARISH

(i) Investigation into new Pedestrian Crossing and safety improvements at White Horse Lane, Great Ashby.	50 percent =	£1500
(ii) Funding of design of passing place scheme at Church Lane, Graveley.	50 percent =	£4250
(iii) Additional signage at Church Lane Graveley.	50 percent =	£1550
TOTAL REQUESTED		£7300
Contribution to be sought from Graveley Parish Council		£1000
GRANT FUNDING AWARDED		£6300

28. GRANT REQUEST – NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE HIGHWAYS – JOINT MEMBER PANEL – KNEBORTH PARISH

RESOLVED:

- (1) That a grant of £3200 be awarded to North Hertfordshire Highways – Joint Member Panel as fifty per cent joint matched funding for a project in Knebworth Parish as detailed below, on condition that Knebworth Parish Council provide funding of £1000:
- (2) That the provision of the grant funding already agreed does not imply that funding will be granted for work on 2009/2010

PROJECT IN KNEBORTH PARISH

Lighting and some resurfacing at Pondcroft Road to London Road.	50 percent =	£4200
Contribution to be sought from Knebworth Parish Council		£1000

GRANT FUNDING AWARDED

£3200

29. MEETING WITH WYMONDLEY PARISH COUNCIL

Councillor Brindley informed the Committee that he had attended a meeting of Wymondly Parish Council on 14 July 2008. At the meeting a number of highways issues were raised as detailed in the notes provided by Councillor Brindley. Members debated that the most effective way for Parishes to raise transport issues was through the Parish Plan. Members requested that Councillor Brindley refer the list of issues raised to North Hertfordshire Highways Partnership – Joint Member Panel at the earliest opportunity.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Brindley for attending the Wymondley Parish Council meeting and keeping the Southern Rural Committee informed.

The meeting closed at 9.50 p.m.

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Chairman