

**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

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

**Meeting held at The Community Centre, Simpson Drive, Baldock  
on 4 December 2006 at 7.30p.m.**

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

**IN ATTENDANCE:** *Barrie Jones (Head of Financial Services), Richard Tiffin (Area Planning Officer), Stuart Izzard (Senior Community Development Officer (Youth)) and Ian Gourlay (Senior Committee & Member Services Officer).*

**ALSO PRESENT:** *2 members of the public.*

**67. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence were received from Councillor M.E. Weeks (Chairman)

**68. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2006 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and signed by the Chairman.

**69. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS**

The Chairman agreed to accept consideration of the following additional item: Vehicle Damage to Grass Verges (see Minute 81 below).

**70. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

No declarations of interests were made during the meeting.

**71. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Sarah Duckett had given due notice that she wished to speak at the meeting on behalf of the Ashwell and Morden Rail User Group regarding reduced rail services for Ashwell and Morden Railway Station.

Sarah explained that, from 11 December 2006, First Capital Connect (FCC) was withdrawing the 7.03am fast service from Ashwell & Morden Station (which also stopped at Baldock Station) to London Kings Cross, and replacing it with an earlier, slower service at 6.49am. She understood that there were plans to further reduce services (potentially affecting Letchworth. Station) by December 2007.

Sarah commented that FCC had taken the decision in order to reduce overcrowding on trains, albeit that the 7.03am service was one of the least overcrowded of the morning trains. She considered that FCC was attempting to maximise the number of passengers it brought into London each day, whilst degrading the service it offered to passengers in the rural areas. She felt that there should be more, not less, fast trains that stopped at rural stations such as Ashwell and Morden.

Sarah considered that the result of the FCC decision would be an increase in traffic on the roads, as passengers from rural areas travelled to stations such as Letchworth and Stevenage in order to pick up a fast service into London. There was significant local support for the stance of the Ashwell and Morden Rail User Group, as evidenced by a petition containing 1,400 signatures. Sarah concluded by asking for the Committee's support in exerting pressure on FCC to re-consider its decision to reduce early morning fast train services for Ashwell and Morden and Baldock.

The Chairman reported that it was customary for Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) to be consulted by FCC about 2 months before changes to rail timetables, but this was more for advance information rather than actual consultation, and HCC had little scope to request changes to individual train times at certain stations. HCC was able to input into the National Rail Timetable Development process which was reviewed in January each year and, if there were to be major changes from December 2007, would expect to be consulted upon them – however, how much HCC could influence change to the decisions was open to debate. HCC considered that FCC had not broken its franchise specification because the rail timetable was usually subject to a certain amount of flexibility within train pathing conditions set by Network Rail – the fundamental rule was the number of trains which served a particular station, and in this respect Ashwell and Morden would not have a reduced service, but a change in the type of service provided (ie. from a fast to a semi-fast train into London).

The Committee was supportive of the plight of the Ashwell and Morden Rail User Group, and acknowledged that the timetable changes would affect passengers from other villages in the District who used the Cambridge to London Kings Cross line. It was hoped that possible solutions such as extended platforms and/or longer trains would help to alleviate current overcrowding difficulties.

The Chairman commented that he had seconded a motion to Council submitted by Councillor I.J. Knighton on this matter, seeking to raise the issue at a District level. This motion would be considered at the Council meeting on 14 December 2006.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the Ashwell and Morden Rail User Group be fully supported, and the issues raised during the debate be brought to the attention of the Council by the Councillor Knighton and the Chairman as part of their presentation of the motion on rail services to the Council meeting on 14 December 2006;
- (2) That First Capital Connect be invited to send an appropriately senior representative to the next meeting of the Committee on 15 January 2007, in order to explain the rationale behind the decision for Ashwell and Morden and how it proposed to address the needs of rail passengers in the rural areas of North Hertfordshire in the near future.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To support the endeavours of the Ashwell and Morden Rail User Group in seeking a re-instatement of the existing early morning rail service to that station.

**72. CHAMPION NEWS**

The Senior Community Development Officer (Youth) presented a report of the Head of Community Development & Cultural Services to the Committee, which advised them of the activities undertaken by the Senior Community Development Officer (Youth) since the meeting of the Committee held on 6 November 2006, and brought to their attention some important community based activities that would be taking place during the next few months.

In respect of the Baldock Town Hall, Members were concerned at the length of time it had taken to expedite the repair works to the roof / ceiling of the building. The Head of Financial Services advised that the necessary repair work had recently been requisitioned, and undertook to inform Members of the likely start date for the works.

With regard to the Baldock by-pass, the Senior Community Development Officer (Youth) was requested to urge Hertfordshire County Council to carry out the post by-pass traffic volume survey as soon as possible.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the report of the Head of Community Development & Cultural Services be noted;

- (2) That the actions taken by the Senior Community Development Officer (Youth) to promote greater community capacity and well-being for communities in the Baldock & District area be endorsed.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To keep Members of the Committee apprised of the latest developments in community activities in the Baldock & District area.

**73. BALDOCK & DISTRICT AREA COMMITTEE DEVELOPMENT & AREA VISIONING BUDGETS 2006/2007**

The Senior Community Development Officer (Youth) presented a report of the Head of Community Development & Cultural Services to the Committee, which set out the budgetary situation for the Committee, together with 4 additional grant applications and one funding request that had been received.

The Senior Community Development Officer (Youth) drew the Committee's attention to the funding request submitted by the Council's Senior Tree Officer, to complete the re-pollarding programme in the Nightingale Way area of Baldock. The Senior Tree Officer had also put forward a suggested tree planting programme for the town, as outlined in Appendix 2 to the report.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the current expenditure and balance of the Development Budget be noted;
- (2) That the sum of £1,500 be allocated from the Baldock Town Ward Development Discretionary Budget(s) towards the completion of the re-pollarding programme in the Nightingale Way area of Baldock;
- (3) That the sum of £2,100 be allocated from the Baldock Town Ward Development Discretionary Budget(s) to fund the planting of 12 trees from the list set out in Appendix 2 to the report of the Head of Community Development & Cultural Services.

**REASONS FOR DECISION:**

- (1) The report was intended to apprise Members of the financial resources available to this Committee. It drew attention to the current budgetary situation, assisted in the effective financial management of the Committee's budget and ensured actions were performed within the Authority's Financial Regulations and the guidance contained in the Grants procedure;
- (2) The awarding of financial assistance to voluntary organisations and the use of discretionary spending allows the Committee to further the aims and strategic priorities of the Council.
- (3) To continue the committed programme of re-pollarding works to the verge Lime trees in the Nightingale Way area and to continue the visual and environmental enhancement of areas within the town through the adoption of a progressive tree planting programme.

**74. GRANT APPLICATION – ASHWELL MUSIC FESTIVAL**

**RESOLVED:** That the sum of £350 be awarded to the Ashwell Music Festival as a financial contribution toward the development and delivery of the annual Music Festival's Programme, such funds to be allocated from the Arbury Ward Discretionary Development Budget.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** The awarding of financial assistance to voluntary organisations and the use of discretionary spending allows the Committee to further the aims and strategic priorities of the Council.

**75. GRANT APPLICATION – ASHWELL THEATRE GROUP**

**RESOLVED:** That the sum of £300 be awarded to the Ashwell Theatre Group as a financial contribution toward the purchase of new stage curtaining for productions at the village hall, such funds to be allocated from the Arbury Ward Discretionary Development Budget.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** The awarding of financial assistance to voluntary organisations and the use of discretionary spending allows the Committee to further the aims and strategic priorities of the Council.

**76. GRANT APPLICATION – ASHWELL UNITED REFORMED CHURCH**

**RESOLVED:** That the sum of £350 be awarded to the Ashwell United Reformed Church as a financial contribution toward the provision of Disabled Toilet Facilities, such funds to be allocated from the Arbury Ward Discretionary Development Budget.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** The awarding of financial assistance to voluntary organisations and the use of discretionary spending allows the Committee to further the aims and strategic priorities of the Council.

**77. GRANT APPLICATION – NORTH HERTS BOOK FESTIVAL 2007**

**RESOLVED:** That the sum of £250 be awarded to the North Herts Book Festival as a financial contribution toward the hosting of various events in Baldock as part of the North Herts Book Festival 2007, such funds to be allocated pro rata from each of the Ward Discretionary Development Budgets, as follows:-

Arbury Ward - £45  
Baldock East Ward - £40  
Baldock Town Ward - £130  
Weston & Sandon Ward - £35

**REASON FOR DECISION:** The awarding of financial assistance to voluntary organisations and the use of discretionary spending allows the Committee to further the aims and strategic priorities of the Council.

**78. PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

**RESOLVED:** To determine the applications as set out in the report of the Head of Planning and Building Control as submitted to the Committee in the following schedule:

**SCHEDULE**

<b>Reference Number</b>	<b>Description of Development and location</b>	<b>Decision</b>
<b>06/02033/1HH</b>	<b>105 High Street, Ashwell</b> Erection of boundary fencing.	<b>GRANTED</b>
<b>06/02034/1LB</b>	<b>105 High Street, Ashwell</b> Erection of boundary fencing.	<b>GRANTED</b>
<b>06/01713/1HH</b>	<b>Redfearns, Roe Green, Sandon</b> Erection of detached double garage and single storey building following demolition of existing outbuilding (as amended by plans received on 17 <sup>th</sup> and 22 <sup>nd</sup> November 2006).	<b>GRANTED</b> (See (a) below)

(a) **RESOLVED:** That application 06/01713/1HH be **GRANTED** planning permission, subject to the conditions set out in the report, and with the following two additional conditions:-

7. No windows (other than those shown on the approved plan) shall be inserted in any elevation or roof of the development hereby permitted.

Reason: To safeguard the appearance of the outbuilding and to ensure that it respects the setting of the listed building and character of the conservation area.

8. Any vegetation along the northern boundary of the site which is removed or destroyed during the construction of the outbuilding hereby granted permission, shall be replaced before the end of the first planting season following the completion of the development; and any vegetation which, within a period of 5 years from the completion of the development, die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased, shall be replaced during the next planting season with others of similar size and species, unless the Local Planning Authority agrees in writing to vary or dispense with this requirement.

Reason: To safeguard and enhance the appearance of the completed development and the visual amenity of the locality.

#### **79. PLANNING APPEALS & ENFORCEMENT**

The Area Planning Officer informed the Committee that the following planning appeal had been lodged since the meeting of the Committee held on 6 November 2006:

Appellant	Mr and Mrs S. French
Reference number	06/01729/1LB and 06/01730/1
Address	Driftway Barn, Gannock Green, Sandon
Proposal	Single storey side and rear extensions
Method	Written representations

The Area Planning Officer informed the Committee that no planning appeals had been determined since the meeting of the Committee held on 6 November 2006.

The Area Planning Officer informed the Committee that there were no significant planning enforcement issues to report since the meeting of the Committee held on 6 November 2006.

#### **80. DISPOSAL OF LAND ADJACENT TO 27 DARK LANE, SANDON**

The Head of Financial Services presented a report to the Committee which sought their views on the proposal to dispose at discount an area of land adjacent to 27 Dark Lane, Sandon to North Hertfordshire Homes Ltd (NHH). He advised Members that Cabinet had deferred making a decision upon this matter pending the outcome of a public meeting which had been held in Sandon on 25 November 2006.

The Head of Financial Services reminded the Committee that an alternative site for the provision of affordable housing in Sandon had been identified in Rushden Road, but that the District Housing Needs Survey had demonstrated a total need within 5 years of 12 affordable units in the village (6 could be accommodated on the Dark Lane site, and 6 on the Rushden Road site).

The Ward Member for Weston and Sandon, Councillor S.K. Jarvis, informed the Committee that, at the public meeting held on 25 November 2006, the preference of NHH, supported by a majority of residents, was for development first of the Rushden Road site. It was therefore moved by Councillor Jarvis, and seconded by Councillor Marilyn Kirkland, that the Council should not declare the site adjacent to 27 Dark Lane, Sandon as surplus to requirements until such time as NHH has firm proposals to develop it. Upon being put to the vote, the motion was lost.

**RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:** That the site adjacent to 27 Dark Lane, Sandon be declared as surplus to the Council's requirements and the land be disposed of to North Hertfordshire Homes Ltd at a discounted value for the provision of affordable housing and a smaller improved pocket park.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To enable the provision of sustainable developments of two sites within the Parish of Sandon by the provision of 12 eco-standard affordable residential units and by the improvement and retention of a pocket park.

**81. VEHICLE DAMAGE TO GRASS VERGES**

Councillor M.R.M. Muir raised the issue of vehicle damage to grass verges, in particular such damage caused by contractors' vehicles on verges adjacent to building sites. He asked if anything could be achieved in planning terms to alleviate this problem.

The Area Planning Officer explained that, in normal circumstances, planning conditions could only be imposed in relation to areas of the site within the applicant's control. However, he had discovered a highway condition which could perhaps go some way towards dealing with the problem, as follows:-

**"All areas for parking, delivery and storage associated with the construction of the development, including the access works, must be provided on land which is not public highway (including verges) and the use of such areas must not interfere with the use of the public highway.**

**Reason: In the interests of public amenity, highway safety and the safe flow of traffic in the vicinity of the site."**

The Area Planning Officer commented that he would discuss this condition with planning colleagues with a view to encouraging them to use it wherever possible. However, he pointed out that it could only be used in connection with highway land, and not with verge areas in private ownership.

The Committee was supportive of the Area Planning Officer's suggestion, but was mindful that contractors could deny that their vehicles had caused the problem, unless firm evidence was supplied by the enforcing authority. Members considered that the Highway Authority should be more proactive in its enforcement of damage to highway verges caused by parked vehicles, and should take more decisive action in prosecuting the perpetrators of such behaviour.

**RESOLVED:** That the Area Planning Officer discuss the suggested highway condition, as detailed above, with planning colleagues with a view to encouraging them to use it wherever possible on applications for new developments.

**RECOMMENDED TO NORTH HERTS HIGHWAY PARTNERSHIP JOINT MEMBER PANEL:** That Hertfordshire Highways be requested to take more proactive steps in its enforcement of damage to highway verges caused by parked vehicles, to take more decisive action in prosecuting the perpetrators of such behaviour, and to arrange for the publicity of any successful prosecution actions in order to deter other potential perpetrators.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** In order to develop methods to alleviate the problem of contractors' vehicles parking on highway verges.

The meeting closed at 8.45p.m.

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Chairman

