

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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

**Meeting held at The Community Centre, Simpson Drive, Baldock
on 23 May 2005 at 7.30 p.m.**

PRESENT: *Councillors I.J Knighton (Chairman), M.E Weeks (Vice-Chairman),
G.C. Hollands and M.R.M. Muir.*

IN ATTENDANCE: *Planning Control and Conservation Manager, Head of Financial
Services, Area Planning Officer, Community Development Officer for
Baldock Area, and Committee and Member Services Officer.*

1. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed Councillors and the public to the meeting, and informed them that a reporter from the BBC was present at the meeting, and would be recording some scenes of the Committee room and the public in attendance to accompany their report. He asked that anyone who did not wish to be included in any recording inform either him or the reporter, and they would then be excluded from the shots.

The Chairman then informed the public present that, as the planning application in relation to the North Hertfordshire Homes Limited compound in Holroyd Crescent, Baldock was not to be considered at the meeting, the Committee would not be able to express any view in response to the public presentations on this subject, as this would prejudice their participation in consideration of the planning application should it come to Committee for consideration.

The Chairman expressed the thanks of the Committee to Councillor M.R.M. Muir for his hard work during his term as Chairman of the Committee for the previous civic year.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S.K. Jarvis and A.D. Young.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 April 2005 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and signed by the Chairman.

4. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman agreed consideration of an urgent item to determine the procedure to be used for determination of a planning application submitted by North Hertfordshire Homes Limited for the retention of a temporary site compound on open space in Holroyd Crescent, Baldock. This matter would be considered as Agenda Item 11.

5. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interests were made at the meeting.

6. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mrs G. Holding had given due notice that she wished to speak at the meeting regarding the erection of fencing to block off a public accessway by a garage compound in Chilvers Bank, Baldock.

Mrs Holding informed the Committee that a security fence had originally been erected beside the garage compound, blocking off a bridleway, with bollards to allow pedestrian access. This had then been entirely fenced off following submission of a petition to North Hertfordshire Homes Limited, by a very small group of individuals,

purportedly to prevent off-road motorcycling and reduce vandalism in the garage compound. Since this fencing had been installed, the Council had twice had to come out to deal with fly tipping at the site, and people were climbing over the fence to use the bridleway.

Mrs Holding stated that she had communicated with North Hertfordshire Homes Limited in relation to this matter on many occasions, on behalf of local residents and users of the bridleway, but they had been uncooperative. They had also previously stated they were going to re-open the access, then changed their mind but refused to inform residents of the reason for this, stating that it was confidential information. She also stated that, in a recent article in a local newspaper, North Hertfordshire Homes Limited had responded to the claims of residents by stating they had received no complaints from any local residents, which was untrue.

Mrs Holding informed the Committee that a petition was currently being circulated in the area and that this, together with official application forms for the bridleway and its access to be turned into an official right of way identified on the definitive map of public footpaths and bridleways in the County, would be forwarded to the County Council in due course.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Holding for addressing the Committee in relation to this matter, and requested that she provide copies of the petition and relevant forms for the Council's information.

Mr Aaron Slack had given due notice that he wished to speak at the meeting regarding the erection by North Hertfordshire Homes Limited of a compound on recreation land in Holroyd Crescent, Baldock. Mr Slack was speaking on behalf of young people in the area who used the recreation land for sports and playing.

Mr Slack informed the Committee that many children played there as they were in sight of their parents in the overlooking houses, and away from the gangs of older youths who had become prominent in many areas of the town. He stated that the children spent most of their time on the recreation land during school holidays, playing sports and other activities, and the loss of this land meant they had nowhere else to go and nothing to do, especially as the only other facility in the vicinity was the play area and land at Avenue Park, Baldock, which was across a main road from where the children lived, and had many problems with gangs of older youths and anti-social behaviour. Mr Slack stated that many of the children's families were tenants of North Hertfordshire Homes Limited but that, whilst they wanted a new bathroom and kitchen, they did not want to get this at the cost of losing their playing area.

Mr Slack also submitted a petition on behalf of the children and young people who used the land of 301 signatures.

Ms Michelle Turner had also given due notice that she wished to speak at the meeting regarding the erection by North Hertfordshire Homes Limited of a compound on recreation land in Holroyd Crescent, Baldock.

Ms Turner circulated some photographs to the Committee, which showed the current situation at the site and demonstrating how the situation was affecting the community. She highlighted the highly-used community nature of the site, especially as it was surrounded by residential properties (dense housing), busy roads and retail and industrial areas.

Ms Turner expressed concern that the entrance to the compound was adjacent to the park entrance, so a young child could run straight out of the play area into the path of works traffic accessing the site, and questioned whether those workers accessing the site would be subject to Criminal Records Bureau checks to ensure child safety measures were in place. She also stated that the compound blocked parents view of the play area generally, which meant many children were no longer allowed to play

there, and there was a strong possibility that any accidents would go unobserved by residents.

Ms Turner reiterated the point made by Mr Slack in relation to the increasing incidence of gangs of youths congregating throughout the town, particularly around the recreation grounds at Avenue Park and Bakers Close, and causing trouble for local residents. She also expressed concern that the nearest alternative play area for children was at Avenue Park, which was across a main road and well out of sight of parents, leaving the children unsupervised and unprotected.

Ms Turner stated that, in addition to the loss of the recreation area for the children and young people, the community had lost their safe access way through to Tesco and the high street, as they now had to go through a dark and very narrow, bumpy passage, which was an area where groups of young people congregated, both at night and in the daytime, and residents did not feel safe.

Ms Turner expressed concern that, now the contractors were already on site, it would be very difficult to make them stop their business and vacate their site, and stated that North Hertfordshire Homes Limited should move to one of the other sites identified within the town, all of which were in close proximity to the current site, and not on recreation land. She also stated that, by ignoring the Council's wishes and refusing to remove the compound, North Hertfordshire Homes Limited were contravening the human rights of the children and local residents and having a detrimental effect on the health and wellbeing of the children.

Mrs Claire Strong had also given due notice that she wished to speak at the meeting regarding the erection by North Hertfordshire Homes Limited of a compound on recreation land in Holroyd Crescent, Baldock. Mrs Strong was speaking on behalf of North Hertfordshire Homes Limited, as the Chairman of their Board of Directors.

Mrs Strong informed the Committee that one of the commitments made to Council tenants at the time of the housing stock transfer in March 2003 was to undertake an improvement scheme for revamping kitchens and bathrooms throughout the District within the first 5 years of their management. When locating the compounds necessary to undertake this work, North Hertfordshire Homes Limited consulted locally and tried to be sensitive, where possible, with regard to the location of the compounds, and the proper reinstatement of the sites following completion of the works. She also stated that no other compound installed by North Hertfordshire Homes Limited in the District had required planning permission.

Mrs Strong outlined the history of the upgrade project in the area, and the circumstances which had led to the confused situation in this instance. She stated that North Hertfordshire Homes Limited welcomed the meetings held with North Hertfordshire District Council to try and identify potential alternative sites for the compound, but informed the Committee that no adequate alternative sites had been identified. She also stated that, even if the compound were removed immediately, the site would not be suitable to be used for recreational purposes for a long time anyway.

Mrs Strong expressed disappointment to hear the views expressed at the meeting and stated that, whilst the situation was regrettable when looked at in hindsight, decisions as to the action to be taken now had to be made on the basis of the current situation. She stated that it was the view of North Hertfordshire Homes Limited and the Council's Cabinet that, as the amenity land could not be brought back into use quickly enough to meet residents' requirements, it was best for North Hertfordshire Homes Limited to complete their works as quickly as possible then reinstate the site to an equal or better standard than it was before.

The Chairman thanked Mr Slack, Ms Turner and Mrs Strong for their representations made to the Committee, and confirmed that copies of the documents and petitions

submitted would be circulated to the relevant officers dealing with the case for information. He reiterated that no debate would take place by the Committee at the meeting as a planning application had now been submitted in relation to this matter, but that all representations made would be considered in the determination of that application.

Mrs Strong added that the concerns raised by Mrs Holding in relation to the erection of fencing to block off a public accessway by a garage compound in Chilvers Bank were of concern, and stated that she would personally take those back to North Hertfordshire Homes Limited to help progress resolution of the matter.

7. CHAMPION NEWS

The Community Development Officer (Youth and Baldock Area) presented a report of the Strategic Director of Customer Services to the Committee, which outlined actions he had taken since the meeting of the Committee held on 11 April 2005, and highlighted key events in coming months.

The Community Development Officer (Youth and Baldock Area) informed the Committee that the Baldock Festival had been very well received and busy, especially the Medieval Street Fair, despite the poor weather experienced. He also stated that the stalls and safety equipment purchased with a grant from the Committee had made the Medieval Street Fair a safer, more pleasant event, with the stalls being easier to erect and take down.

In response to a question by the Committee, the Community Development Officer (Youth and Baldock Area) confirmed that the stalls were available for use by any community groups within the Baldock and District area, and agreed to ensure some additional measures were taken to raise community awareness of this availability.

The Community Development Officer (Youth and Baldock Area) confirmed that a tour of the Baldock Bypass for the Committee was still planned, although there had been some difficulty coordinating Councillor availability.

CDO He also confirmed that further information with relation to public footpaths at Sale Drive and adjacent to the Hartsfield School site would be brought to the meeting of the Committee to be held on 7 July 2005.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the actions taken by the Community Development Officer to promote greater community capacity and well-being be endorsed;
- (2) That the continuing development and financial commitments associated with the development of the Town Centre Strategy be approved.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To keep members of the Committee apprised of the latest developments in community activities.

8. BALDOCK & DISTRICT AREA COMMITTEE DEVELOPMENT & AREA VISIONING BUDGETS 2005/2006

The Community Development Officer (Youth and Baldock Area) presented a report of the Strategic Director of Customer Services to the Committee, which outlined the current status of the Committee's budgets. He highlighted the new layout of these budgets in Appendix 1, with particular reference to the inclusion of the Committee's Visioning budget.

Councillor S.K. Jarvis informed the Committee that work on a Rural Strategy had now reached a point where visioning monies could be allocated to specific projects within the rural areas. The Community Development Officer (Youth and Baldock Area) confirmed that this now meant the Committee could consider such projects, and

stated that some proposals would be brought to the meeting of the Committee to be held on 4 July 2005.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the budgetary expenditure, balances and carry forwards from the Ward Development Budgets, the Small Area Grants Budget and the allocated Visioning Budgets be noted;
- (2) That proposals for rural visioning schemes be brought for consideration at the meeting of the Committee to be held on 4 July 2005.

REASON FOR DECISION: The awarding of financial assistance to voluntary and community organisations, schemes and initiatives.

9. GRANT APPLICATION – WESTON VOLUNTARY NURSERY

RESOLVED: That the sum of £500 from the Weston and Sandon Ward Discretionary Development Budget be awarded to Weston Voluntary Nursery as a contribution toward the cost of purchasing materials and associated equipment to self-build an external storage facility for use by the Toddler Group and Pre-School Children's Group.

10. GRANT APPLICATION – SANDON SPORTS AND SOCIAL CLUB

RESOLVED: That the sum of £420 from the Weston and Sandon Ward Discretionary Development Budget be awarded to Sandon Sports and Social Club as a contribution toward the cost of developing part of the Club's existing building to create a coffee bar style facility for young people.

11. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

RESOLVED to determine the applications as set out in the report of the Planning, Control and Conservation Manager as submitted to the Committee in the following schedule:

SCHEDULE

Reference Number	Description of Development and location	Decision
05/00462/1	Land to North West of Bradfield Barn, Gannock Green Farm, Gannock Green, Sandon Change of use from agricultural land to paddock and erection of stable block.	GRANTED (as per report)

12. AMENDMENT OF PLANNING APPLICATION – 04/00087/1, LAND OFF YEOMANRY DRIVE, BALDOCK

The Area Planning Officer gave a brief resume of the situation in relation to this piece of land and planning application, and confirmed the purpose of consideration of this item. He confirmed that the Village Green application in relation to this site was still under consideration by the relevant Authority, but stressed that this was not a material consideration in the determination of this application.

The Committee expressed their disappointment in the Planning Inspectorate's decision in relation to Twigdens' appeal, but acknowledged that the Council's legal challenge related purely to the technical consideration that there was no mechanism for the enforcement of necessary planning obligations within the Inspectors decision and not to his consideration of the planning merits of 2 ½ storey development. They also noted that, whilst the developers technically now had planning permission for a scheme on the site, no works could commence until the Village Green application was determined.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the concerns expressed by local residents be acknowledged;
- (2) That the resolution of the Committee on 11 April 2005 (Minute 112 refers) that planning application 04/00087/1 be modified to include 2½ storey dwellings on plots 1, 2, 18 and 19 with the same legal agreements and conditions set out in the report to Committee of that date be ratified.

13. PLANNING APPEALS

The Area Planning Officer informed the Committee that the following Planning Appeal had been determined since the meeting of the Committee held on 11 April 2005:

Appellant	Mr D Long
Reference number	04/01184/1HH
Address	Beckfield Farm Cottage, Green End, Sandon
Proposal	2 storey side extension
Decision	Appeal dismissed

14. PROCEDURE FOR DETERMINING PLANNING APPLICATION FROM NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE HOMES LIMITED FOR THE RETENTION OF TEMPORARY SITE COMPOUND ON OPEN SPACE, HOLROYD CRESCENT, BALDOCK.

At the request of the Committee, the Head of Financial Services outlined the history of this issue, and its consideration by Cabinet. He stated that, whilst Cabinet had resolved at its meeting on 19 April 2005 that North Hertfordshire Homes Limited must remove the compound from this site (Minute 217 refers), subsequent investigations into alternative sites yielded no realistic alternatives. The matter was reconsidered at the meeting of the Cabinet held on 17 May 2005, where it was resolved that the compound could be retained for a temporary period, subject to planning permission being granted (Minute 14 refers).

The Area Planning Officer then reiterated that this item was not about the merits of the proposal, but about agreeing the procedure for determining the planning application. He stated that, whilst this application would normally automatically come to Committee for determination as it related to a proposal on Council-owned land, Members were invited to consider the alternative option of delegating the power to determine this application to the Head of Planning and Building Control in conjunction with the Chairman of the Area Committee.

The Committee stated that it was clear from the public's attendance at the meeting and the petitions already submitted in relation to this item that it was one of wider public importance, which should therefore be determined in public. They also noted that the statutory consultation period did not end until 24 June 2005, which meant that the timescale for consideration under delegated power would be much the same as for consideration by the next available Committee.

RESOLVED: That, following statutory publicity, consultation and officer consideration, the application be reported to the meeting of the Committee to be held on 4 July 2005 for determination.

The meeting closed at 8.47 p.m.

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Chairman