

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

LETCHWORTH COMMITTEE

**Meeting held at Council Offices, Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City
on 25 January 2006 at 7.30 p.m.**

PRESENT: *Councillors M. Paterson (Chairman), J.M. Cunningham (Vice-Chairman), J.F. Barry, Simon Bloxham, T.W. Hone, David Kearns, Lorna Kercher, Alison Kingman, Ian Mantle and Lawrence McNamara.*

IN ATTENDANCE: *Parks & Countryside Development Manager, Principal Planning Officer, Community Development Officer for Letchworth Garden City and Committee & Member Services Officer.*

ALSO PRESENT: *Inspector Geoff Camp and Sergeant Mike Wood (Hertfordshire Constabulary), Toby Batchelor (Designer of Norton Common Skatepark).*

94. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gary Grindal and Mrs L.A. Needham.

95. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2005 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and signed by the Chairman.

96. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was submitted for consideration by the Committee.

97. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interests were made during the meeting.

98. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr Philip Ross had given due notice that he wished to speak at the meeting regarding wheeled sports provision at Norton Common, Letchworth Garden City. Mr Ross was speaking on behalf of the Letchworth Garden City Town Council's Planning Committee.

Mr Ross stated that many of the Town Councillors had attended the Open Day on 14 January 2006, and that the Town Council were generally very supportive of the idea of provision of wheeled sports provision on Norton Common. However, some concern had been expressed about the proposed location as it was felt that it was too close to the children's play area, which could result in the children and their mothers being intimidated by users of the facility, and the play area being taken over skaters when they were not using the skate site. There was also concern that the use of concrete to construct the facility could preclude any future expansion or development of the site.

Mr Richard Porteous had given due notice that he wished to speak at the meeting regarding wheeled sports provision at Norton Common, Letchworth Garden City, on behalf of the user group. Mr Porteous informed the Committee that over 130 people had attended the Open Day and that, whilst some had opposed the proposal when they arrived, most had been supporting it by the time they left as they had understood that it was actually quite a small facility, and the people who would be using it were actually quiet and well-behaved. Most of the remaining objectors were linked to the Bowls Club and were more concerned with the "bad element" that could be attracted by the facility than by the skaters themselves. Mr Porteous thanked the Councillors,

officers and public for their continuing support in moving this project towards completion.

Mr Ed Bowen had given due notice that he wished to speak at the meeting regarding wheeled sports provision at Norton Common, Letchworth Garden City. Mr Bowen spoke on behalf of the design and user group and stressed that the skatepark was designed carefully with constant input from users. He stated it included features suitable for all ages and abilities, incorporating structures and challenges from the streets whilst minimising space wastage.

In response to questions from the Committee, Mr Bowen stated that the risk of someone getting seriously hurt using the skatepark was unlikely as users know to skate within their own limits. However, he also stressed that it was very unlikely that anyone would be using the skatepark alone, so if anyone did have an accident there would be someone else with them who could go and get assistance.

The Chairman thanked Mr Ross, Mr Porteous and Mr Bowen for addressing the Committee.

99. COMMUNITY POLICING UPDATE

Inspector Geoff Camp and Sergeant Mike Wood made an oral presentation to the Committee which provided them with an update on community policing issues in Letchworth Garden City. Inspector Camp also provided Members of the Committee with an organizational chart which identified all the members of his community team.

Inspector Camp provided Committee with an update on crime statistics, comparing the period of 1 April 2005 – 24 January 2006 with the period of 1 April 2004 – 24 January 2005. These statistics were as follows:

- All crime – up 2.9% - from 2,408 incidents to 2,478 incidents
- Burglary (dwellings) – down by 19.6% - from 97 incidents to 78 incidents
- Robbery – up 23% - from 26 incidents to 32 incidents
- Motor vehicle offences – up 19.6% - from 245 incidents to 293 incidents
- Violent crime – down 8.2% - from 564 incidents to 518 incidents

With regard to the statistic for violent crime, Inspector Camp informed the Committee that this reduction in incidents was mirrored in the reduction of serious violent crime incidents, although he did not have the statistics available. With regard to the motor vehicle offences, whilst there was an overall increase of 19.6% over the period, following some significant arrests in December 2005, the number of incidents had dropped significantly, causing a 46% decrease in motor vehicle offences since 1 January 2006.

With regard to the statistic for robbery, Inspector Camp informed the Committee that this was very high at 23% due to the significant pattern in late November/early December 2005 whereby elderly females walking alone in Letchworth Garden City town centre were being violently mugged. He stated that 4 arrests had since been made and, although those individuals were now on bail, there had been no further incidents since.

Sergeant Wood provided the Committee with an update about Operation Resolve, which was a multi-agency operation to address problems with anti-social behaviour and youths congregating in large groups at the weekend. He also informed the Committee that all those against whom official action was taken (in the form of penalty notices, searches etc) were adults, not young people.

With regard to the problems experienced with people throwing things from the top of the multi-storey car park, Sergeant Wood informed the Committee that he had tasked his team to address the problem, and had increased patrols in the area. Enforcement action had also been conducted, which included taking three people back to the police station for strip-searching for drugs, confiscation of eggs, and issuing of fixed

penalty notices and reprimands. By conducting enforcement action like this the situation has improved, and the situation will continue to be monitored.

Sergeant Wood also informed the Committee that the man who broke the windows at the Letchworth Garden City Town Hall and the Broadway Cinema during the Christmas period had been captured on CCTV. He was arrested and charged and will appear at the Magistrates Court at the end of the month to answer charges.

Inspector Camp informed the Committee that Letchworth Police Station was to become a training school for new officers of the Hertfordshire Constabulary. Officers would be trained there for 12 weeks, with new intake every 6 weeks. Inspector Camp invited all Councillors to visit the Station when the training school was running, and to take part in the training as one of the role model actors.

In response to questions from the Committee, Inspector Camp and Sergeant Wood informed the Committee that there was no evidence that the new Licensing Act was causing much more crime through excessive or binge drinking.

The Chairman thanked Inspector Camp and Sergeant Wood for attending the meeting and for their presentation to the Committee.

100. WHEELED SPORTS PROVISION, NORTON COMMON, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY

The Parks & Countryside Development Manager presented a report of the Head of Leisure & Environmental Services to the Committee which advised Members of the results of consultation and sought their approval to proceed with the scheme to provide a wheeled sports facility at Norton Common. He also introduced the designer Toby Batchelor to the Committee, who was present in case the Committee had any technical questions to ask.

The report included the following appendices:

- Appendix 1 – Design of skatepark
- Appendix 2 – Location plan
- Appendix 3 – Summary of responses from bowlers
- Appendix 4 – Summary of responses from residents
- Appendix 5 – Summary of responses from public display day

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the design of the skatepark and new access pathway from the swimming pool roadway be approved;
- (2) That the revised location of the skatepark be approved;
- (3) That once installed the facility be monitored by the Community Safety Team and the North Hertfordshire Crime Prevention Officer and, if required, the Council's Property Services Manager be asked to make available portable/temporary CCTV;
- (4) That the skatepark be reviewed six months after opening and the outcome of review be reported back to Committee.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) To meet the Council's strategic objective to *"Promote first class leisure and cultural facilities to contribute to healthy living for all our citizens"*.
- (2) To implement the work programme of the Council's Play Area and Outdoor Youth Provision Strategy.

101. GRANGE PLAY AREA AND OUTDOOR YOUTH PROVISION

The Parks & Countryside Development Manager presented a report of the Head of Leisure & Environmental Services to the Committee, which sought approval for the project scope relating to a Community Park at Grange Central and improvements to the Gaunts Way recreation ground. The report also advised Members of the proposal to engage Groundwork Hertfordshire to develop and manage the project, the draft scope for which was attached as Appendix 1.

The Parks & Countryside Development Manager informed the Committee that Cabinet had approved the use of Groundwork Hertfordshire for this project, and that the Board of North Hertfordshire Homes Limited had committed £75,000 towards this project as well. He also stressed that the draft agreement in the scope at Appendix 1 was very much an outline draft, and would be revised and rewritten by NHDC and North Hertfordshire Homes Limited's legal teams before use, in order to properly protect our interests.

RESOLVED: That the draft project scope relating to a community park at Grange Central and improvements to the Gaunts Way Recreation Ground be approved.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

- (1) To provide the framework for partnership working to best meet the needs of the local community.
- (2) To secure significant external funding for the provision of a Community Park.
- (3) To meet the Council's strategic objective to *"Promote first class leisure and cultural facilities to contribute to healthy living for all our citizens."*

102. CHAMPION NEWS

The Community Development Officer for Letchworth Garden City presented a report of the Head of Community Development & Cultural Services to the Committee, which advised them of the activities undertaken by the Community Development Officer for Letchworth Garden City since the meeting of the Committee held on 14 December 2005, and brought to their attention some important community based activities that would be taking place during the next few months.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report of the Head of Community Development be noted;
- (2) That the actions taken by the Community Development Officer for Letchworth Garden City to promote greater community capacity and well-being for Letchworth Garden City communities be endorsed.

REASON FOR DECISION: To keep members of the Committee apprised of the latest developments in community activities in Letchworth Garden City.

103. ANNUAL GRANTS AND DEVELOPMENT DISCRETIONARY BUDGET 2004/05

The Community Development Officer for Letchworth Garden City 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 1 additional grant applications that had been received.

The Committee expressed their disappointment that the budget sheets had not been updated since the last meeting to show the monies that were being reclaimed from projects which were not going ahead or which had excess monies as agreed. The Committee were also concerned to note that the £750 granted to Willian Village Hall at the meeting on 14 December 2005 (Minute 76 refers) was not on the budget sheets and had not be released to the Village Hall.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the current expenditure and balance of the Development Budget be noted;
- (2) That the request for brown leisure signs to the main attractions within the town be fed into the signage project, with particular priority placed onto signage to the outdoor swimming pool.

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.

104. GRANT APPLICATION – MENCAP NORTH HERTS FRIENDSHIP SCHEME

RESOLVED: That the sum of £640 be awarded to Mencap North Herts Friendship Scheme as a financial contribution toward implementation of a pilot befriender scheme.

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.

105. 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

Reference Number	Description of Development and location	Decision
05/01777/1	Autoglym, Works Road, Letchworth Garden City Erection of enclosed car wash bay and raw materials storage area with bunded enclosure following removal of section of existing building, as a part variation of previous planning permission granted on 7 September 2005 under ref 05/00910/1	GRANTED (as per report)
05/01727/1	BOC Ltd, Dunhams Lane, Letchworth Garden City Erection of 2 storey portable office building and two pre-fabricated double garages for storage purposes	GRANTED (as per report)

In response to questions from the Committee, the Principal Planning Officer stated that with regard to planning permissions references 05/00998/1 and 05/01013/1 – Starwood House, Avenue One, Letchworth Garden City – granted at the meeting of the Committee held on 6 September 2005 (Minute 38 refers), no landscaping scheme had yet been submitted for approval. However, the Principal Planning Officer informed the Committee that he had spoken to the applicant's agent and was advised that a scheme was being prepared for submission in the week commencing 30 January 2006 and he further stated that, should the scheme not be submitted, a report for Members to consider the need for the service of a breach of condition would be submitted to the meeting of the Committee to be held on 8 March 2005.

106. PLANNING APPEALS

The Principal Planning Officer informed the Committee that no planning appeals had been lodged or determined since the meeting of the Committee held on 14 December 2005.

The meeting closed at 9.34 p.m.

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Chairman