

**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**LETCHWORTH COMMITTEE**

**Meeting held at Council Offices, Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City  
on 28 September 2005 at 7.30 p.m.**

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

**IN ATTENDANCE:** *Head of Financial Services, Chief Engineer, Principal Environmental Health Officer, Projects Manager – Planning Policy and Projects, Parks and Countryside Development Manager, Community Development Officer for Letchworth Garden City and Committee and Member Services Officer.*

**ALSO PRESENT:** *Guy Brigdan, Hertfordshire County Council and Inspector G. Camp, Hertfordshire Constabulary.*

**40. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs L.A. Needham and Peter Mardell.

**41. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the meetings held on 6 July 2005 and 6 September 2005 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and signed by the Chairman.

In response to a question from Councillor Lorna Kercher, it was confirmed that the grant of £1,500 to the Letchworth Settlement, awarded at the meeting of the Committee held on 6 September 2005 subject to the establishment by officers of a suitable method for awarding that sum (Minute 35), had been agreed and given to the Settlement.

In response to another question from Councillor Kercher, it was agreed that the Council's Tree Officer be requested to bring a report updating the Committee on progress made with the tree planting programme in Letchworth Garden City to the meeting of the Committee to be held on 9 November 2005.

**42. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS**

No other business was submitted for consideration by the Committee.

**43. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

Councillor David Kearns declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 11 – Annual Grants & Development Discretionary Budget 2005/2006 – with regard to the skateboard mentoring project, as he was North Hertfordshire District Council's representative on North Hertfordshire College's governing body. Councillor Kearns reserved his right to speak and vote on this matter.

**44. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Mr Richard Porteous had given due notice that he wished to speak at the meeting regarding skateboard provision in Letchworth Garden City. Mr Porteous also presented the Committee with a petition of almost 200 names in support of a skatepark in Letchworth Garden City.

Mr Porteous had been in contact with Steven Sears, the Project Manager at North Hertfordshire District Council, the Chairman of the Council, Mrs Lynda Needham, and with Stuart Kenny, Director General of the Letchworth Garden City Heritage

Foundation. Mr Porteous stated that, whilst there was provision for adults and young children in Letchworth Garden City, there were no outdoor leisure facilities for young people, which meant that many of them had nowhere to go.

Mr Porteous had spoken to many people - adults and young people – and they, together with the people who had signed the petition, had clearly indicated the need for a skatepark in Letchworth Garden City, which could be used for skaters, skateboarders, people on bmxs and even those on scooters. He also stated that, as supported by health care professionals, skateboarding had been proven to be very good for the health as it was an excellent, active sport, using the whole body.

Mr Porteous stated that, whilst the Council was proposing to build 3 smaller skateparks, the optimum provision would be one larger park, in a central, easily accessible location. He said that the best location for this park would be Norton Common. He also stressed the importance of ensuring the new skatepark was constructed of materials and in a manner whereby it could not be burnt down or vandalised as all previous skateboard ramps in the town had been. He stated that Toby Batchelor from Customer Riders in Letchworth Garden City had agreed to design the skatepark to meet these objectives.

The Chairman thanked Mr Porteous for his presentation to the Committee, and accepted the petition on the Committee's behalf.

**45. WHEELED SPORTS PROVISION FOR LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY**

The Parks and Countryside Development Manager presented a report of the Head of Leisure Services to the Committee which sought the Committee's approval for a revision to the programme of works listed in the Council's Play Area and Outdoor Youth Provision Strategy, to meet changing circumstances and more quickly re-establish a skateboarding provision in Letchworth Garden City.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Parks and Countryside Development Manager confirmed that the proposed site for the facility on Norton Common was located next to the Common's existing recreation area. The central location of this site for the town meant that it would be a priority for implementation. He also confirmed that the exact nature of facilities provided would, within restraints, be determined by a user group of young skaters in the town. He also confirmed that a priority would be to ensure that the new facility would be constructed of a hard-wearing material that would also be less susceptible to fire and vandalism. Emergency access was from a clear road through from the swimming pool area to the proposed site, lighting for the site, enabling year-round access to the facility for users, could quickly be installed using existing power supplies, and CCTV coverage could be arranged using one of the Council's temporary camera.

The Parks and Countryside Development Manager stated that, with the restriction on implementation of a BMX trail on the Common by the Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre, the £10,000 identified for that project could be added to the £40,000 allocated to the skate park provision, meaning a total budget for the project of £50,000.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That, due to its central location in Letchworth Garden City, priority be given to provision of a skateboarding facility at Norton Common;
- (2) That, in view of the concerns raised by the Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre, Officers be requested to investigate alternative locations for a BMX track and report their findings to a future meeting of this Committee.

**RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:**

- (1) That the need for a large, centrally located skate park be removed from the Play Area and Outdoor Youth Provision Strategy;

- (2) That the capital programme of works be amended to provide the following revised programme for Letchworth Garden City:

LOCATION	PROPOSAL	DATE	VALUE
Norton Common	New skate park by play area	2005	£50,000
Grange Recreation Ground	New skate park	2006	£25,000
Baldock Road Recreation Ground	New skate park	2006	£25,000
Wilbury Recreation Ground	BMX Circuit	2007	£30,000
Howard Park	Small wheeled sports feature linked to development of Gardens	2010	£30,000

**REASON FOR DECISIONS:** To meet the Council's strategic objective to "promote first class leisure and cultural facilities to contribute to healthy living for all our citizens".

**46. MURCO GARAGE, SOUTHFIELDS, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY**

The Head of Financial Services presented a report of the Strategic Director of Financial and Regulatory Services which informed the Committee of the current circumstances relating to the re-letting of the Southfields Petrol Filling Station on the Grange Estate, Letchworth Garden City.

The Committee expressed their disappointment that the under-tenant had decided not to take on the Lease after all and, whilst supporting the proposal to develop part or all of the site for the provision of affordable housing, expressed their desire to investigate alternative tenants to enable continued provision of this community asset.

**RESOLVED:** That the report of the Strategic Director of Financial and Regulatory Services be noted.

**RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:**

- (1) That the site be further advertised to invite interests from alternative providers to facilitate the continued provision of petrol filling station provision for the Grange Estate;
- (2) That, should the above attempts fail to result in any realistic interest from alternative providers within the period of 3 months, the whole site should be disposed of to North Hertfordshire Homes Limited at a discounted value, for the provision of affordable housing.

**REASON FOR DECISIONS:** To ensure that, should the continued use as a petrol filling station be proven variable, it be maintained to ensure continued provision of a valuable community asset, whereas it otherwise be better used for redevelopment of affordable housing.

**47. RECENT BUS SERVICE CHANGES**

The Projects Manager – Planning Policy and Projects presented a report of the Head of Planning and Building Control to the Committee that summarised the background to recent bus service changes affecting Letchworth Garden City, and set out a suggested way in which the District Council might influence future bus service changes. The Projects Manager also introduced Guy Brigdan from Hertfordshire County Council, who was in attendance to answer any questions the Committee might have, and to pass any comments and suggestions back to those who had made the decisions resulting in these changes.

The Committee expressed their disappointment that the changes had been implemented without the District Councillors being consulted or informed, and that the

changes did not provide an adequate service for those affected by the changes. They stressed that the current provision was not acceptable, and stated that Arriva's reluctance to share information on the grounds of commercial sensitivity was unacceptable as discussions on these grounds could be held under Part 2 restrictions at a Committee meeting, or by holding a private meeting.

The Committee welcomed the idea of setting up an informal working party to allow for better consultation in future, but expressed some concern that this would not become anything more than a "talking shop", as Arriva seemed reluctant to truly share information.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee note the information provided in the report of the Head of Planning and Building Control on the process and events leading up to recent bus service changes and support the suggested way forward on how the Council may influence future changes.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To ensure the Committee was apprised on recent events and aware of a possible way forward.

#### 48. **COMMUNITY POLICING REPORT**

The Chairman welcome Inspector Geoff Camp to the meeting, who was present to provide the Committee with an update on Community Policing in Letchworth Garden City.

Inspector Camp provided the Committee with an update on crime statistics, comparing the period of April – 18 September 2004 with the same period in 2005. These statistics were as follows:

- Burglary from dwellings – 42 incidents in 2005, down from 27 in 2004. Detection rates for this crime had seen a 5.1% improvement.
- Robbery – 15 incidents in 2005, up from 11 in 2004. Detection rate for this crime had also fallen by 3%.
- Motor crime – 158 incidents in 2005, up from 113 in 2004.
- Violent crime – 292 incidents in 2005, down from 336 in 2004. Detection rate for this crime had seen a 10.7% improvement.

Inspector Camp stated that, whilst motor crime had seen a significant increase this year, measures were in hand to deal with the problem. He informed the Committee that two key offenders in that field had been arrested within the last 2 days. He also informed the Committee that 2 youths causing trouble in the town centre had been successfully prosecuted – one had been convicted of 18 offences, the other of 8 – and made the subjects of anti-social behaviour orders.

Inspector Camp also informed the Committee that operations to ensure householders were encouraged to implement crime prevention measures in their homes. He stated that a further 457 addresses had been visited in Letchworth Garden City, and it was hoped that this would further help reduce the burglary from dwellings rate.

With the impending arrival of Halloween and Christmas, together with the clocks going back an hour, Inspector Camp stressed the need for householders to take extra precautions. These included ensuring that lights or radios were placed on timers so that they would come on after dark to give the impression that the house was occupied, and not leaving boxes from Christmas gifts in visible places, so that potential burglars would be unaware of the goods available within the house.

The Chairman thanked Inspector Camp for his presentation to the Committee.

#### 49. **CHAMPION NEWS**

The Community Development Officer for Letchworth Garden City presented a report of the Head of Community Development 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 6 July 2005, and brought to their attention some important community based activities that would be taking place during the next few months.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Community Development Officer for Letchworth Garden City confirmed that questionnaires had now been distributed via schools, youth service provision and outreach projects on the Grange Estate to determine users' requirements for the Grange Youth Wing.

Councillor Tony Hartley informed the Committee that Highfield School were planning to hold a 3 day Science Festival, to include talks and practical demonstrations and activities. The Community Development Officer for Letchworth Garden City had agreed to work in consultation with the school to help ensure the events took place as planned.

**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.

**50. 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 to the Committee, which set out the budgetary situation for the Committee, together with 4 additional grant applications that had been received.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the current expenditure and balance of the Development Budget be noted;
- (2) That the situation with regard to the facility improvements being made by the Letchworth Garden City Eagles Youth Football Club, as set out at Appendix 2 to the report, be noted;
- (3) That the allocation of Visioning funds for the provision of recycling litter bins in Letchworth Garden City town centre be used to provide the bins in the following locations:
  - a) Eastcheap, near Superdrug
  - b) Leys Square
  - c) Leys Avenue outside Pams Fish Bar
  - d) Howard Park
  - e) Broadway Gardens

The total cost for provision of those bins, calculated at the cost of £800 each including installation, is £4,000.

- (4) That, with regard to the Visioning funds allocated for the provision of dog waste bins in Letchworth Garden City, Members be asked to bring any suggestions to the next meeting of the Committee to be held on 9 November. Any remaining funds would then be returned to the Committee's Visioning Budget;
- (5) That £5,000 be allocated for the provision of an OCN accredited course for young skateboard tutors, in conjunction with North Hertfordshire College.

**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.

**51. GRANT APPLICATION – NORTH HERTS BOWLS CLUB**

**RESOLVED:** That the sum of £750 be awarded to the North Herts Bowls Club (Letchworth Common) as a financial contribution toward replacement of unsafe flooring in the pavilion's main hall and kitchen.

**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.

**52. GRANT APPLICATION – KHALSA YOUTH FOOTBALL ACADEMY**

**RESOLVED:** That the sum of £750 be awarded to the Khalsa Youth Football Academy as a financial contribution toward publicity and promotion for a coaching club and football activities festival at Fernhill School, Letchworth Garden City.

**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.

**53. GRANT APPLICATION – LETCHWORTH BUDDHIST COMMUNITY CENTRE**

**RESOLVED:** That the sum of £200 be awarded to the Letchworth Buddhist Community Centre as a financial contribution toward the costs associated with participation in the Stevenage World Forum for Ethnic Communities Festival.

**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.

**54. GRANT APPLICATION – WILLIAN VILLAGE HALL**

With regard to the grant application for funds toward the cost of renovations at Willian Village Hall, the Community Development Officer for Letchworth Garden City informed the Committee that consideration could no longer be given to the application. This was because, as a result of a flood at the Hall, the works had already been carried out, and the grant criteria specified that no payments would be made retrospectively.

The Committee expressed their disappointment at this judgement, as the works had only be carried out as a emergency following the flood, in order to ensure the Hall could continue to be used. In response to a question from the Committee, the Community Development Officer for Letchworth Garden City confirmed that he had seen the Hall's balance sheet as part of their application, and the cost of the works had taken more than 60% of their funds.

As a result of the emergency nature of the repairs to the Hall, Councillor David Kearns **PROPOSED**, Councillor T.W. Hone **SECONDED** and the Committee **RESOLVE** that the sum of £750 be awarded to the Willian Village Hall as a financial contribution toward the cost of renovations.

**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.

**55. PROPOSED HEALTH WALKS PROGRAMME**

The Chairman informed the Committee that this Item had been withdrawn from the Agenda as the original plan as devised by the Countryside Management Service (CMS) had now been updated. The CMS had now informed officers that, following changes made as a result of experiences with similar schemes elsewhere, they would be focusing their Health Walks Programme first in Hitchin and the surrounding area, before rolling out to other areas of the District.

The Committee expressed their disappointment that the Health Walks Programme would now not be implemented in Letchworth Garden City until a later date. Councillor Alison Kingman informed the Committee that the Letchworth Arts & Leisure Group ran a whole series of walks of different lengths, which provided the opportunity to encourage people of all abilities to walk.

**56. PRELIMINARY REVIEW OF PILOT SCHEME FOR THE USE OF PROFESSION MEDIATION IN THE RESOLUTION OF NEIGHBOURHOOD DISPUTES**

The Principal Environmental Health Officer presented a report of the Head of Housing and Environmental Health to the Committee which provided the Committee with an interim update on the progress of the mediation trail that it commenced on 1 April 2005. The report also sought authorisation to alter the terms of reference of the trial so that it would be extended until the end of 2005 (subject to existing funding provision).

The Principal Environmental Health Officer informed the Committee that people were consistently opting for formal investigation under the statutory process, with the potential associated court cases, rather than attempting mediation first to resolve their problems. In response to a question from the Committee the Principal Environmental Health Officer confirmed that those people who had chosen not to try mediation would be contacted to determine the reason they chose not to take up mediation.

The Principal Environmental Health Officer also confirmed that neighbourhood disputes on matters relating to the High Hedges legislation would be dealt with entirely separately to this trial.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That it be noted that the mediation trail had yet to yield robust evidence on the value of professional mediation in the resolution of neighbourhood disputes;
- (2) That the trail be extended as per existing terms of reference until 31 December 2005 or until the remaining budget is fully used;
- (3) That the mediation trail not be extended to the attempted resolution of neighbour disputes involving tall trees/hedges;
- (4) That preparation be made for a potential growth bid in order to finance professional mediation across the entire District for 2006/2007 as per the existing terms of reference.

**REASONS FOR DECISIONS:**

- (1) The use of professional mediators at the early stage of a neighbour dispute was a relatively new development and it was likely that a true picture of the value of this dispute resolution mechanism would take some time to develop. It was therefore too early to comment, with confidence, on the value of professional mediation at that juncture.
- (2) Mediation might only yield material benefits if it can assist neighbours in resolving their disagreements in the long term. Accordingly, before a full evaluation of this pilot scheme could take place it was necessary to establish the longer term benefits of mediation.

(3) Notwithstanding recommendations (1) and (2) above, it was surprising how few complaints wished to use mediation to solve their disputes as opposed to the use of more formal powers. This was particularly noteworthy as complainants were provided with information explaining the potential benefits of mediation.

**57. TRAFFIC REGULATION ORDER REVIEW – MEMBER CONSULTATION**

The Chief Engineer presented a report of the Head of Environmental Services to the Committee, which invited Members of the Committee to input their local knowledge of existing waiting restriction issues to inform a review of traffic regulation orders, as required by Section 4 of the NHDC Car Parking Strategy. He brought paragraph 4.6 to the Committee's attention, which provided some examples of waiting restriction issues to be considered under the review within the Letchworth Committee area.

**RESOLVED:** That the Members of this Committee gave consideration to the appropriateness of existing waiting restrictions in their area and provide the Chief Engineer with their views and observations before Christmas 2005.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To enable all views and observations to be incorporated into the Traffic Regulation Order review, as required in the adopted Car Parking Strategy.

**58. NAMING OF NEW DEVELOPMENT – PADDOCK CLOSE, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY**

The Chief Engineer presented a report of the Head of Environmental Services to the Committee which asked the Committee to recommend a name for the new development of 38 Elderly Persons Dwellings on the site of the former tennis club at Paddock Close, Letchworth Garden City.

The Committee supported the view that the name for the development should have a link with the Letchworth Tennis Club, and not just tennis generally. It was felt that, as Ralph Swingler had played an important role at the Letchworth Tennis Club, naming the development after him would be a fitting tribute. The extended name also left the development's name signs less open to abuse.

**RESOLVED:** That the name "Ralph Swingler Place" be recommended for this development.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To ensure the Council complies with its duties and powers under street naming legislation.

**59. SCOPING REPORT FOR LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY**

The Projects Manager – Planning Policy and Projects – presented a report of the Head of Planning and Building Control which presented to Members a Scoping Report for the preparation of a Town Centre Strategy for Letchworth Garden City.

The Projects Manager – Planning Policy and Projects informed the Committee that this was the third such Strategy to be prepared by the Council (following Baldock and Hitchin), and that the purpose of such strategies was to create a vision for the town centre and its development over the next 10 years. She also informed the Committee that there would be wide consultation when preparing the Strategy, and that the outcome of the Urban Transport Plan being prepared by Hertfordshire County Council would also be fed into the Strategy, along with other relevant Plans and Strategies, and the Council's Corporate objectives.

**RESOLVED:** That the Scoping Report and Project Plan for the preparation of the Letchworth Garden City Town Centre Strategy be agreed.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To proceed with the necessary work to produce a draft Letchworth Garden City Town Centre Strategy for public consultation in the autumn of 2006. This would enable the Council to adopt the Strategy following 'public' involvement that provided an overall framework for guiding development and enhancement opportunities within the town centre over the next 10 years and, in doing so, contributed toward achieving the Council's strategic objectives.

**60. PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

No planning applications were presented for determination by the Committee.

**61. PLANNING APPEALS**

No planning appeals had been lodged or determined since the meeting of the Committee held on 6 August 2005.

The meeting closed at 10.28 p.m.

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Chairman