



NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
ANNUAL REPORT
2007 - 2008**

April 2008

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Foreword



The purpose of Scrutiny is to make sure that decisions and services that affect local people, are influenced by the views and needs of local people. The Scrutiny process allows councillors of all political shades to challenge policy and actions democratically.

The Scrutiny Committee was formed at North Hertfordshire District Council six years ago. The Committee has developed well and many lessons have been learned during this time. This report reflects on the past year and presents evidence showing how the Committee has continued to contribute to the Council's policy making process.

There are four main principles of good scrutiny and the Committee have sought to follow these when developing the scrutiny work programme. The principles have been developed by the Centre for Public Scrutiny:

- ✓ to provide a critical friend challenge to executives as well as external authorities and agencies;
- ✓ to reflect the voice and concerns of the public and its communities;
- ✓ to take the lead and own the scrutiny process on behalf of the public; and
- ✓ to make an impact on the delivery of public services.

The Committee has used various techniques to put these principles into practise.

Eight items on the work programme have been taken from the Council's Forward Plan. This has given the Committee the opportunity to comment and make recommendations to Cabinet before their final decision on a policy is agreed. The Committee has called-in one item this year. The call-in was in response to concerns within the community about the future management arrangements of Hitchin Town Hall. The recommendations that the Committee made were considered by Cabinet and as a result, alternative arrangements are now in process for the management of Hitchin Town Hall. More examples are shared throughout this report.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to express our appreciation to the Cabinet for their continued co-operation and support and also to the Council Officers who have responded to our requests for evidence and information to support our work.

Finally, I would like to thank Ray, my Vice Chairman, Members of the Committee and Task & Finish groups, who have worked well together in contributing to the Scrutiny work programme for another year.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2007 - 2008

Cllr Raymond Shakespeare-Smith (Vice Chairman)	Cllr David Kearns
Cllr David Billing	Cllr Howard Marshall
Cllr John Bishop	Cllr Alan Millard
Cllr Simon Bloxham	Cllr Michael Muir
Cllr Peter Burt	
Cllr Paul Clark	Cllr John Booth (sub)
Cllr Melissa Davey	Cllr Allison Dear (sub until 22.02.08)
Cllr Sal Jarvis	Cllr Robert Inwood (sub)
Cllr Steve Jarvis	Cllr Lorna Kercher (sub)

Councillor Martin Stears
Chairman, Scrutiny Committee

1. Scrutiny Committee Achievements

The work of the Scrutiny Committee has achieved national recognition!

In May 2007 the 2006/07 Annual Report was included in a list of best practice examples in the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) quarterly newsletter. The newsletter is distributed to stakeholders throughout the Country. The CfPS were particularly impressed by the inclusion of the question and answers that are asked by members throughout the year.

In addition, the Committee's call-in item was used as a best practice example as part of a workshop hosted by the CfPS. The workshop was part of a seminar that was launching a report called "Life of the Party". They were looking for good examples of how Members have handled a potentially "tricky" political issue effectively in scrutiny and chose to include our call-in as an example to reflect this.

2. Scrutiny Sub Groups

The Committee set up two task and finish groups this year:

2.1 Social Inclusion Task & Finish Group

Members: Cllrs Alan Millard (Chair), Melissa Davey, David Levett, Julian Cunningham, Lee Downie, Robert Inwood, Judi Billing and Deepak Sangha.

Due to resourcing matters, it was not possible for this review to be completed.

2.2 Local Economic Development Task & Finish Group

Members: Cllrs Martin Stears (Chair), David Kearns, Marilyn Kirkland, Lawrence Oliver, Peter Burt, Michael Weeks, Allison Ashley and Simon Bloxham.

This group started their review on 12 March 2008. The main aim of the group is to identify organisations which exist to support small businesses and to establish the level of support North Hertfordshire District Council can offer.

The key areas of focus will include:

- securing funding for businesses;
- attracting and retaining more investment locally;
- obtaining a higher business birth and survival rate;
- the effect of Council Policies on business and employment;
- the importance of ensuring the vibrancy of town centres;
- looking at best practice with neighbouring authorities, and;
- capturing opportunities from the 2012 Olympic Games.

2.3 Cadwell Lane Environmental & Safety Issues Task & Finish Group

Members: Cllrs Deepak Sangha (Chair), Martin Stears, Paul Clark, Ray Shakespeare-Smith, Allison Ashley and David Billing.

The Committee supported an area scrutiny task and finish group established by the Hitchin Area Committee. This group was set up as a response to concerns in the local community regarding environmental issues. The recommendations of this group were reported to Cabinet in December 2007 and January 2008. It was agreed that the Hitchin Area Committee would be responsible for monitoring the actions within the recommendations.

2.4 Sheltered Housing Task & Finish Group

Members: Cllrs John Bishop (Chair), Jane Gray, Clare Body and Lorna Kercher.

A “hot topic group” was set up by the Committee in response to concerns about the consultation process undertaken by North Herts Homes’ regarding their decision to decommission a number of their sheltered housing schemes in North Herts.

2.5 Finance Scrutiny Sub Group

Members: Cllrs Lorna Kercher (Chair), Steve Jarvis, David Kearns, Michael Muir, Howard Marshall, Tom Brindley and Allison Ashley.

The Finance Scrutiny Sub Group have continued to scrutinise the quarterly outturns and the annual draft budget, making recommendations to Cabinet through the Scrutiny Committee.

The group have expanded their work programme this year by questioning a member of the Council’s Challenge Board and receiving a presentation from the Finance Portfolio Holder.

3. Review of Task & Finish Groups

The committee recognised that there was a need to look back at all the task & finish groups that had been established, to assess the impact that had been made as a result of the recommendations.

On 14 January 2008, a round table discussion of Members and officers who had been involved in past and current task and finish groups took place. A summary of that discussion can be found within the report attached as Appendix 1.

4. Portfolio Holders

Portfolio Holders have continued to attend Committee meetings to present areas of their work, highlight their achievements/challenges and discuss how the Committee can assist them in developing policies. As in previous years, the Committee values their support and contribution.

5. Scrutiny Recommendations

The Committee has made 11 recommendations on six items to Cabinet. Seven items were accepted and three were noted. A full list of these recommendations with Cabinet’s responses can be found in Appendix 2.

The Finance Sub Group have made two recommendations to Cabinet. Both recommendations have been accepted by Cabinet. A full list of these recommendations with Cabinet’s response, can be found in Appendix 3.

6. Questions

26 questions have been asked by Members during the year. Five of the answers provided have led to either supplementary questions being asked or further work being requested by the Committee. A full list of questions can be found in Appendix 4.

7. Forward Planning

On 25 February 2008 the Committee held its annual workshop to develop the work programme for 2008/09. The workshop included a presentation on the likely implications for Members in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, the Police & Justice Act 2006 and the Councillor Call for Action. Members were also informed about the Council's corporate objectives for 2008/09.

The following list presents the topics that Members agreed to submit to the Scrutiny Committee for its 2008/09 work programme. At its first meeting in the new Civic year, the Scrutiny Committee will decide which two topics to review during 2008/09, leaving space for a "hot topic".

- Revisit major policy changes to monitor how effective they have been and look at any progress made (e.g. waste collection, fly tipping, Customer Service Centre)
- Facilities for teenagers (Joint Scrutiny with Hertfordshire County Council)
- Parking in residential areas
- Green issues and the Council's carbon footprint (CO² emissions)
- Does the provision of sports facilities meet the needs of communities (eg. youth, low income families, rural/urban areas)
- Can the Council support / help to retain local community events
- Effectiveness of the CCTV strategy (joint topic group with partners)
- Increasing public involvement in the work of Scrutiny
- Commercial waste and recycling (task & finish group **or** FSR)
- Services for 50+ and reviewing the existing strategy.

7. Public Participation

As often as possible, the scrutiny process is open to involve local people directly. This can be face to face, online or in writing.

The Scrutiny process is strengthened by involving partners, residents and service users. They can bring in expertise, local knowledge, fresh ideas and an element of external challenge.

The Committee encourages public participation. Ways to get involved include:

- Suggesting a topic for investigation
- Providing evidence at meetings
- Becoming a co-optee on a topic group

For further details about the work of scrutiny or how to get involved, please contact the Scrutiny Officer using any of the methods below:

Write to: NHDC Offices, Gernon Road, Letchworth SG6 3JF

Tel: 01462 474612

Fax: 01462 474633

Email: scrutiny@north-herts.gov.uk



NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REVIEW OF SCRUTINY TASK & FINISH GROUPS

January 2008

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Evolving Role of Scrutiny

The role of Scrutiny is evolving. It is for this reason why the Scrutiny Committee feel it is important to reflect on how it has undertaken in-depth reviews, look at what has worked well, what has not worked well and how it would like to operate in the future.

It is important for everyone involved in the scrutiny process to have a clear understanding of their role and how they can contribute to ensure that scrutiny is effective.

1.2 The Good Scrutiny Guide

The Centre for Public Scrutiny has developed four principles of good scrutiny:

- to provide a critical friend challenge to the executive, as well as external authorities and agencies;
- to reflect the voice and concerns of the public and its communities;
- to take the lead and own the scrutiny process on behalf of the public;
- to make an impact on the delivery of public services.

When selecting a topic (whether it is to be included in the work programme, chosen as a hot topic or chosen by an Area Committee), members should seek to ensure that they can **add value**. The topic should not be a duplication of work already undertaken and should be of interest to the public.

On 14th January 2008, members who chaired past and current task and finish groups as well as officers who were involved in those groups were invited to a round table discussion to look at some of these issues. What follows is a summary of the main aspects of that discussion.

2. Self Evaluation

Task and finish groups that members had been involved in were individually evaluated. Although there was evidence to show whether Cabinet had accepted the recommendations of the groups, it was felt that there was little evidence to show if the recommendations were implemented. For example, members questioned the implementation of the Area Governance, Highways, Engaging Young People and Residential Parking task and finish group recommendations.

- It was agreed that there needed to be a tighter monitoring system throughout the municipal year, not just at the end of the year through the scrutiny annual report. It was suggested that Cabinet monitor the recommendations that they accept and that Scrutiny monitor those that may not need direct input or a decision from Cabinet.
- Scrutiny should monitor their work programme on a regular basis and keep a track of outstanding actions.
- When scoping topics, the draft should be presented to the Scrutiny Chair and Vice Chair for their comments before it is presented to the full Scrutiny Committee.
- Conclusions must be clearly based on evidence and its analysis, and should adequately cover the group's scope, while recommendations must be appropriate to the scope, add value, be worded so that actions and timings are clear, and as far as possible already be owned by the relevant officers and Portfolio Holder.

3. Choosing topics

In order to set the priorities of the Scrutiny Committee and assess whether the Council's resources can accommodate scrutiny's work programme, it was recognised that there needed to be a filtering system in place. It was also felt that opportunities for suggesting topics could be widened.

- A topic criteria / checklist will be used at the next scrutiny workshop (taken from best practice examples, attached as appendix B).
- An article should be written in the local press letting readers know about the recent reviews that have been undertaken, also giving readers the opportunities to suggest future topics.
- Portfolio Holders and officers should be given the opportunity to suggest ideas, and to come to Committee to outline policy development needs at an early stage. An article will be published in NHDC news.
- The website could be used as another tool to encourage further community engagement in suggesting topics (guidance notes will need to be published along with any invitations to the public).
- Other authorities have used tear off slips at the end of published scrutiny reports as a method of encouraging topic suggestions.

The following form is an example of a way to filter and agree topics for the scrutiny work programme. It is suggested that completed forms are considered by the Scrutiny Chair and Vice Chair, where possible with comments from the Corporate Management Team, before a task & finish group is agreed by the Scrutiny Committee.

Criteria used by the Scrutiny Committee before agreeing a task & finish group

Suggested Topic for Task & Finish Group Review:

Reason for suggesting the topic:

- Why should there be a review?
- How is it linked to one or more of the Council's Strategic Priorities and/or is it an issue of public concern?
- How can scrutiny add value or influence change / improvement / efficiencies?

Supporting Evidence:

- Is there adequate support & additional resources available for this review?
- Can this review be undertaken between 3-6 months?
- Are there any other existing mechanisms that could look at this issue (eg. audit, partnership groups)?

Desired Outcome:

- What do you intend to achieve?

Name and contact details:

4. Training

It was felt that participating on task and finish groups was a good training opportunity for members who are new to the Council due to the nature of the meetings and activities involved. It was also felt that new members may benefit from receiving information about the Council's internal processes and developments in the Council and seeking opportunities for ad hoc 1:1 briefings with officers or experienced members.

- A training session on how task and finish groups work should be included in the scrutiny annual workshop.
- Members should be encouraged to attend induction sessions that are organised at the beginning of each Civic Year (currently there has been a low turn out).
- Shadow Portfolio Members should attend Scrutiny and Cabinet meetings as a further learning opportunity.
- Written role descriptions and guidance for Chairs should be published for those members who are new to Chairing and new to task and finish groups.
- Members should be encouraged and supported in seeing how other authorities do scrutiny, and to attend national/regional workshops on scrutiny issues.

5. Conduct of meetings

It was agreed that it would be appropriate to have closed sessions for some task and finish group meetings, but this would be dependent on the subject matter and witnesses involved; however the default should be open sessions. This should be dealt with at the scoping stage where risks would be looked at.

Co-opting members who are not Councillors was agreed as good practice, although it should be ensured that they do not have a conflict of interest or have a negative impact on existing partnership relations.

Portfolio Holders should continue to be invited to attend relevant task and finish groups.

Opportunities should be sought to hold meetings away from the Council offices, where this is more convenient for witnesses from the public or partner bodies or makes them feel more comfortable.

6. Area Committees

Members and officers agreed that the Hitchin Area Committee Cadwell Lane Scrutiny Review worked well. It was established as a response to concerns from the community, although there were concerns about resourcing if all Area Committees chose to undertake a scrutiny review during the same year. The criteria form should control this issue. Some thought needs to be given to what officer resources could be provided to actually run the scrutiny.

Seeking the endorsement of the Scrutiny Committee was a useful way of adding the Council's corporate authority to the work of the group; however, there needed to be clarity as to whether it would be the Area Committee or the Scrutiny Committee that approved the group's recommendations and passed them to Cabinet or the Portfolio Holder.

Appendix 1.

7. Way Forward

Members agreed that the criteria form was a good way to agree topics for the scrutiny work programme. It was agreed that this would be trialed with members before being rolled out externally.

Once the government guidance regarding the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 has been published, NHDC's scrutiny protocol and guidance will be updated and brought to the Scrutiny Committee and the Corporate Management Team for consideration before the start of the new Civic Year.

SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET 2007 - 2008

REPORT/POLICY DECISION	DATE OF CABINET	<u>SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATION</u>	<u>CABINET DECISION</u>
Future Management arrangements for Hitchin Town Hall – Scrutiny Call-in	15.08.07	<p>1. That Cabinet should require a comprehensive and expert report no later than 4 September 2007 on the viability of the preferred and reserve operators and their references and reality of their track records, and that this report should also include options to revert to an earlier stage in the process to allow full consultation with community organisations, users and the Hitchin Committee about securing proper and continuing community use of the Hitchin Town Hall.</p> <p>2. That the Hitchin Committee be consulted in the process of drawing up the proposed 40 year lease for the Hitchin Town Hall, as a Part II matter.</p> <p>3. That a report be prepared for Cabinet's consideration regarding improvements to future consultation exercises as a result of the lessons learnt from the consultation exercise on Hitchin Town Hall.</p> <p>4. That the answer to the Hitchin Forum providing clarity on the status of the Town Hall in respect of Charitable Trusts be made available to all Members of the Council.</p>	<p>1. That:</p> <p>(a) the comprehensive and expert report requested be submitted to the Cabinet meeting scheduled for 16 October 2007, but that the report should not include options to revert to an earlier stage in the process;</p> <p>(b) the proposed transfer date of the premises be put back to a target date of 31 March 2008;</p> <p>(c) the existing Town Hall users be advised of the target date of 31 March 2008;</p> <p>(d) the potential additional running costs of £32,000 as a consequence of the re-scheduling of the transfer date be re-instated in the budget;</p> <p>2. That the matter would be taken to the Hitchin Committee to report on progress at the time that the Council was in a position with any contractor to agree a lease for the building;</p> <p>3. That it be noted that work had already commenced on a revised and improved Consultation Strategy for the Council, which would take on board the lessons learnt from the Town Hall consultation exercise;</p> <p>4. That it be noted that work had commenced on providing clarity on the status of the Town Hall in respect of Charitable Trusts, and that the results of this investigation would be supplied to all Members of the Council.</p>

Appendix 2.

<p>Local Development Framework – Preferred Options Papers on Core Strategy and Development Policies</p>	<p>1. That following suggestions be considered regarding items that could be altered or inserted in the Preferred Options Paper on the Core Strategy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Paragraph 2.16 (table) and throughout: Spatial Strategy – a consistent approach should be adopted for the designation of Great Ashby as a neighbourhood centre; ▪ Paragraph 3.37: Housing – to be brought into line with Core Policy G, which has adopted the stepped approach to affordable housing percentages and thresholds; ▪ Paragraph 3.38: Housing – no change, but Cabinet’s attention be drawn to the forthcoming Strategic Housing Market Assessment, which should identify areas of need in the local housing market; ▪ Paragraph 3.55: Royston Transport – deletion of the final two sentences, and their replacement with a form of words better reflecting the status of any likely Royston south eastern bypass, following previous consideration of this issue by Planning Inspectors at NHDC Local Plan Inquiries; ▪ Key Issue 6: Housing – (b) the reference should be 3.30 not 3.29 and in (d) the replacement of “all medium and large” with “all but the smallest”; ▪ Core Policy B: Design and Sustainability – insertion of “and enhance” before “local distinctiveness”; ▪ Core Policy F: Provision and Distribution of new housing – (1) add after “Oughtonhead Common”, in line with Paragraph 3.30, the words “although not breaching the ridge line west of Lucas Lane and Crow Furlong”; ▪ Core Policy I: Healthier Communities – no change, but Cabinet’s attention be drawn to the urgent need for the Council’s Allotments Strategy to be enhanced, in order to tie in with this policy; <p>2. That following suggestions be considered regarding items that could be altered or inserted in the Preferred Options Paper on Development Policies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Development Policy 2: Biodiversity – no change, but Cabinet’s attention be drawn to the ongoing work seeking evidence to justify the possible future inclusion of a policy 	<p>The Head of Planning & Building Control commented that he had no problem with the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee, with the exception of (1)(f) which should be “or enhance”, and that officers were already working on appropriate forms of wording to address the issues raised by the Committee. He referred to two proposed additional changes to the Core Strategy in respect of the Spatial Strategy table at Paragraph 2.16 and to Core Policy F: Provision and Distribution of new housing.</p> <p>Cabinet made a number of further amendments to the Core Strategy, and it was agreed that appropriate publicity be given to the Preferred Options Papers prior to the commencement of the public consultation period. Cabinet also agreed that specific consultation take place with Town and Parish Councils regarding the Core Strategy and Development Policies.</p> <p>RESOLVED:</p> <p>1. That the Core Strategy and Development Policies Preferred Options Papers, attached as Appendix 1 to the report, be approved for public consultation, subject to the incorporation of appropriate wording to address the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee detailed above, and with the following further amendments:</p> <p>(a) Paragraph 2.16 (table): Spatial Strategy – deletion of the words “limited Greenfield development envisaged” from the Knebworth row;</p> <p>(b) Town Centres: Paragraph 3.9 – addition of a reference to the Baldock town centre initiatives;</p> <p>(c) Deprivation: Paragraph 3.14 – consideration to be given to the inclusion of the Westbury Estate, Letchworth Garden City in this list;</p> <p>(d) Housing: Paragraph 3.33 – deletion of the second sentence in this paragraph;</p> <p>(e) Core Policy F: Provision and Distribution of new housing – in relation to development of Stevenage, the amendment of criterion (ii) to read “west and north” (rather than “west and possibly north”), in accordance with the Secretary of State’s proposed modifications to the East of England Plan;</p>
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Appendix 2.

		<p>for the planting of multiple numbers of trees as a replacement for each tree required to be felled as a result of development proposals;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Development Policy 4: Protecting Amenity – an additional (5) to read “pollution, including light pollution”; ▪ Development Policy 5: Design, Safety and Sustainability – an additional section to be worded by officers with the aim that gated community developments will not be permitted; ▪ Development Policy 14: Density and mix of dwellings and mixed uses – no change, but Cabinet’s attention be drawn to the possibility that the thresholds relating to the mix of dwellings for various sizes of sites may require amendment as a result of the completion of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment; ▪ Development Policy 21: Open Space – this policy should be expanded to include retention of open spaces within the villages in the District, as well as the four major towns; ▪ Development Policy 24: Small and medium sized businesses – the definition of small and medium sized businesses detailed in the supporting text be incorporated into the policy wording; ▪ Development Policy 28: Local Centres – the map relating to Redhill Road (Hitchin) should be changed as it is a duplicate of map relating to The Parade (Letchworth Garden City). 	<p>(f) Core Policy H: Transport: Paragraph 5.50 – replacement of the first sentence “The district has a relatively good transport network” with “Whilst the district has a relatively good transport network, there are a number of areas in need of improvement”;</p> <p>2. That the Head of Planning and Building Control, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport, be authorised to agree any minor amendments and typographical errors that may need to be made that do not alter the meaning of this document;</p> <p>3. That appropriate publicity be given to the Preferred Options Papers prior to the commencement of the public consultation period;</p> <p>4. That specific consultation take place with Town and Parish Councils regarding the Core Strategy and Development Policies.</p>
Approval of the Hertfordshire Supporting People Strategy 2007-2012		<p>1. That the Hertfordshire Supporting People Strategy 2007-2012 be supported;</p> <p>2. That the Scrutiny Committee’s concerns with regard to the potential impact of the Strategy on services for older people, particularly in respect of the proposed 10% reduction in Supporting People funding for sheltered housing, be noted.</p>	<p>1. That the Hertfordshire Supporting People Strategy 2007-2012, as contained at Appendix 1 to the report, be approved;</p> <p>2. That the recommendations and concerns of the Scrutiny Committee be noted.</p>
HCC Highway Environmental Maintenance Agency Agreement	16.10.07	<p>That the recommendations contained in the report, including Option 3 – Renew the Highway Agency Agreement with increased HCC funding, be approved.</p>	<p>That Option 3 set out in the report, namely renewal of the Highway Environmental Agency Agreement with increased HCC funding for trees, be approved;</p> <p>That the Scrutiny Committee be thanked for its comments in respect of the report.</p>

Appendix 2.

<p>Stevenage and North Herts Areas Action Plan – Issues and Options Public Consultation</p>	<p>16.10.07</p>	<p>That the draft Stevenage and North Herts Area Action Plan – Issues and Options Public Consultation document be approved, subject to the inclusion of the following suggested improvements/amendments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The SNAP boundary area – a clarification that this area was a study area and not a development area (Paragraph 24); ▪ How do I respond? – a statement emphasising that this was a joint consultation and giving the reasons why responses to the document were to be sent to Stevenage Borough Council only (ie. to avoid duplication of effort, etc.); ▪ The removal of the background shading entitled “Stevenage Borough Council” from all of the maps contained in the document; ▪ Appendix 3 – Sustainability Appraisal Summary – a statement in this appendix to clarify that this was a part of the document in the early stages of preparation; ▪ New Road Schemes – inclusion of a statement in connection with Question 8, explaining that, irrespective of the answers given to this question, the matter of any possible improvements to the A1(M) would be a matter for the Government; ▪ Areas of Search for Housing Development Map – clarification in the text supporting this map, to indicate that these areas were the maximum areas of search, and that consultees could indicate different boundaries within these areas for what they considered to be appropriate for any housing growth (eg) not right up to the boundaries of the adjacent village settlements; ▪ Protection of the Natural Environment – an expansion of Paragraph 37 to give further examples of the areas and types of natural environment that both Councils would expect to be protected. 	<p>The Regional & Strategic Sites Manager confirmed that officers had no difficulty in incorporating into the document the amendments proposed by the Scrutiny Committee. He further advised that Stevenage Borough Council had been informed of the proposed Scrutiny Committee amendments, and its Executive had raised no objections to the amendments when approving the document for public consultation at its meeting held on 10 October 2007.</p> <p>That, subject to such amendments as may be made, the contents of the SNAP Issues and Options Public Consultation document, incorporating the comments of the Scrutiny Committee, be agreed, and its publication authorised for use in a public and stakeholder consultation running from 5 November 2007 to 18 January 2008.</p>
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Appendix 2.

<p>Green Space Strategy</p>	<p>29.01.08</p>	<p>1. That, in respect of the Green Space Strategy:</p> <p>(a) the attention of Cabinet be drawn to the potential for working with Parishes and Town Councils to meet the aims of the Strategy and to seek further funding opportunities;</p> <p>(b) it be noted that the Scrutiny Finance Sub-Group look forward to the final Green Space Strategy being completed so that work can begin as soon as possible.</p> <p>2. That, in respect of the Budget Proposals 2008/09:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Item SG29 – Street Naming and Numbering – that Cabinet request information from officers on the implications if developers chose not to pay for the service or challenges the Council; ▪ Item SG28 – Reduction of all Area Committee grants by 10% - this item be withdrawn from the efficiency proposals. 	<p>1. In relation to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee referred to earlier in the meeting (see Minute 99 above), the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and E-Government confirmed that officers would be drawing on the potential for working with Parishes and Town Councils to meet the aims of the Strategy and to seek further funding opportunities. He joined the Scrutiny Committee in looking forward to the Strategy being completed, and work begun, as soon as possible.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the progress of the Green Space Strategy, as outlined in the report, be noted;</p> <p>That the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee be noted and taken forward in the on-going work on the Strategy.</p> <p>2. In relation to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee referred to earlier in the meeting Cabinet commented as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Item SG29 – Street Naming and Numbering – it was not considered that the issue of developers choosing not to pay for the service or challenging the Council was not a matter for major concern, as this had only proved to be an issue on one (out of 400) applications for the service. ▪ Item SG28 – Reduction of all Area Committee Grants by 10% - it was agreed that this item be withdrawn from the list if Efficiency Items contained in the Budget Proposals 2008/09.
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**FINANCE SUB GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS REFERRED TO CABINET
2007 - 2008**

REPORT	DATE OF CABINET	<u>FINANCE SUB GROUP RECOMMENDATION</u>	CABINET DECISION
1 st Quarter Monitoring Report for Revenue and Capital – Planning Pre-Application Advice	16.10.07	The Vice-Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee advised that, at its meeting held on 9 October 2007, the Scrutiny Committee had supported a recommendation to Cabinet of the Scrutiny Finance Sub-Group that the Council write to the Government opposing a planning fee structure which allowed any secondary planning applications to be entitled to free advice.	Cabinet supported this recommendation. Letter was sent on 19/11/07.
3 rd Quarter Revenue Monitoring Report	19.02.08	Members were concerned about the £40,000 carry forward of the training budget. The Finance Sub Group requested that clear identification of specific projects are produced the their next meeting on 31str March 2008, that shows how the training budget carry forward will be spent in 2008/09.	The Portfolio Holder for Finance supported the comments of the Finance Scrutiny Sub Group.

SCRUTINY QUESTIONS 2007 - 2008

DATE OF SCRUTINY	<u>QUESTION</u>	<u>ANSWER</u>
19.06.07	<p>During the recent election campaign a number of misunderstandings and ambiguities occurred relating to councillors' communication with officers, and some officers seemed unclear about the rules which apply to councillors ward work and community leadership role during election periods.</p> <p>Could the council please publish to all councillors a detailed account of the content and methodologies of the briefings given to officers on conduct and communication with members during these periods, so that officers and members can all be aware of the rules which are being applied, and understand their implications?</p>	<p>The principal requirement during the run up to an election is to ensure that any information put out by the Council is of a factual nature only and does not seek to promote any candidate or party group. Therefore the rules are principally addressed to external communications. There is no bar on normal business between officers and Members dealing with ward issues; as always, any advice must be politically impartial.</p> <p>The Local Government Act 2000 resulted in the approval by Parliament of a new Code of Practice on Local authority Publicity. This includes the following guidance:</p> <p>"The period between the notice of an election and the election itself should preclude proactive publicity in all its forms of candidates and other politicians involved directly in the election. Publicity should not deal with controversial issues or report views, proposals or recommendations in such a way that identifies them with individual members or groups of members. However, it is acceptable for the authority to respond in appropriate circumstances to events and legitimate service enquiries provided that their answers are factual and not party political."</p> <p>It is standard practice of the council to remind staff of the special communication requirements placed on officers and members by means of the briefing system through Team Talk and this was done this year in the issue of 7 March. In that we said:</p> <p>The period between the notice of election which will be published on 27 March and the election itself on 3 May is colloquially known as "purdah". During this period we have to be all the more cautious to ensure that our publicity could not be taken to promote any candidate or party. This means that officers will be used as spokespersons unless there is an emergency need for a portfolio spokesperson.</p>

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		<p>Team Talk is approved by Corporate Management Team and spread to employees via the cascade briefing system.</p> <p>Normal working relationships between Members and officers are covered by protocol in the constitution. Officers can continue to assist Members with ward casework and on community leadership issues. Section 5 of that protocol concerns advice to party groups and clause 5.7 makes specific reference to the “purdah” period:</p> <p>Officer attendance at any public meeting will generally be avoided during the period between the announcement and conclusion of any local or parliamentary election affecting the area involved, and will only occur during such a period if all parties supporting candidates in the election have been invited to take part in the meeting</p> <p>Officers and Members are advised to seek clarification for individual situations to ensure that they are working in full compliance with the Constitution. Officers would welcome a discussion with interested councillors, preferably from all parties, to see whether advice to officers during election periods needs to be clarified and improved.</p> <p>OUTCOME - That a meeting be arranged between representatives of each of the Political Groups and appropriate officers to discuss a means to ensure that officers were clear about the rules which applied to councillors’ ward work and community leadership role during election periods.</p>
19.06.07	<p>What arrangements are being made to brief and develop members understanding of the emerging legislation emanating from the local government White Paper, including the two quite separate and distinct forms of Community Call for Action?</p>	<p>A formal briefing for all North Herts Councillors on the initial proposals and intent of the Local Government White Paper was held on Monday 8th January 2007. This briefing also included consideration of the specific areas to be addressed through the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill, currently undergoing its second reading in the House of Lords and intended to receive Royal Assent by Autumn of 2007, and the potential implications for the district.</p> <p>This briefing was further supplemented by a specific session with scrutiny and PARC members, on 26th March, in order to look more closely at the implications for overview and scrutiny arrangements for the authority, duty placed on community partners to co-operate, and integration of all the requirements into the relevant committee work programmes etc.</p>

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		<p>A schedule of the potential consultation dates established by the Government has been drawn up and once relevant consultations on not only overview and scrutiny arrangements, but also changes to performance management, Local Area Agreements and the introduction of the Comprehensive Area Assessments are received, members are notified via the weekly MIS and their views sought to inform any corporate response. Similarly, as the LG and Public Involvement in Health Bill develops and becomes statute, it would be appropriate to provide relevant timely briefings; the LG White Paper and its constituent parts are included in the Performance Audit and Review, and Scrutiny Committee work/training programmes for the current year to ensure that both overview and scrutiny committees receive appropriate information.</p> <p>The two different approaches required for 'Community Call for Action' are currently being considered by officers, especially in the light of new partnership arrangements for community safety. The establishment of locality policing panels has just been finalised, alongside revised guidance on the working practices of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) itself, so the scrutiny officer and community safety team are to develop a draft proposal of how referrals made under the CCfA can be made to relevant partners, and scrutiny members themselves, to be considered and dealt with. A brief report containing these draft proposals for consideration will be available in the Autumn, alongside additional guidance awaited from the Government regarding performance management and reporting arrangements.</p> <p>Similarly, the second CCfA, that of call- in following the failure of an individual ward councillor to resolve a long standing situation, will require a system to be established in order that the issues raised are indeed within agreed criteria, and background information on actions taken to date is available for initial consideration by the scrutiny committee. The authority's scrutiny officer is currently working on identifying the principles of good practice (provided by the IDeA and scrutiny support agencies) to draft a proposed referral procedure in order to ensure that the call in is used to its best effect, the actions to be taken are agreed with members, officers and partners/residents, resourced and delivered.</p> <p>In the interim, the Scrutiny Officer has prepared a briefing note for the Chair and Vice Chair of Scrutiny outlining the potential for use of the Community Call for Action, a copy of which attached to this response.</p> <p>OUTCOME - the Committee noted that further discussion would be likely to take place before the legislation took effect.</p>
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<p>19.06.07</p>	<p>What arrangements are currently available to give full council internet and intranet access to those councillors who do not possess their own personal computers?</p>	<p>1. From 2007/08, and as part of their Basic Allowance, all Members receive £300 towards the costs of IT/computer equipment and peripherals. In-addition members in receipt of a Special Responsibility Allowance (Cabinet Members, Committee Chairmen etc.) receive an additional £100. These allowance can be used as a contribution towards an initial purchase, and or upgrade/replacement in future years. Or see (3)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A dedicated computer is not required to gain full access to NHDC. Systems. please see (2) . The Council intranet is accessible to staff/members who are authorised users, and can be accessed from any computer. ▪ Broadband capability at your chosen locations ie. home/constituency office is a recommendation due to the size of emails and attached documents issued. <p>2. All members have had a NHDC email account created for them. This account can be accessed from any computer (personal or 3rd party/ work owned) including using your personal log in to any council computer in locations such as the Members Office, and Committee Services - subject to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the member has signed compliance with the NHDC email, intranet and Data Protection policy requirements . ▪ The log-in and password has been issued - (available from IT Help desk during office hours) email ithelpdesk@north-herts.gov.uk or tel: 01462 474444 <p>3. Alternatives are a recharge against this members allowance to provide a basic Computer and or a Blackberry type phone, (however a Blackberry may limit the size of files able to be received, and also will incur additional ongoing usage costs) Blackberry request can also be registered with itheldesk@north-herts.gov.uk or tel: 01462 474444</p> <p>OUTCOME - the Committee felt that the benefits of assisting the few Members who did not possess personal computers at home would be likely to outweigh the small costs that would be involved. This matter should be referred to the Access to Services Project Board for consideration.</p>
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<p>19.06.07</p>	<p>Queen Street Cottages, Hitchin:</p> <p>What has happened to enforcing the planning decision re: putting these cottages in back into a habitable condition? The Inspector upheld the Habitable Order, but the cottages are still boarded up.</p>	<p>In September 2005, planning permission was refused for the use of land for the open display of cars for sale following the demolition of cottages for the following reasons:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The demolition of Nos 37 and 38 Queen Street would result in the loss of buildings which make a positive contribution to the architectural character of the street scene particularly in relationship to the setting of nearby buildings which are listed and within the conservation area. Furthermore, the extension of area for the display of cars would be likely to detract from the visual amenities of the street scene and would fail to maintain an adequately high standard of environment. The development would be contrary to the provisions of Policies 1, 20 and 22 of the District Local Plan No 2 with Alterations. 2. The loss of two dwellings without replacement would be contrary to Policy 35 of the District Local Plan No. 2 with Alterations. Notwithstanding the evidence submitted, the Local Planning Authority is of the opinion that the dwellings are not beyond economic repair and considers that there are no exceptional circumstances which could override the normal presumption against the loss of dwellings in the district. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A subsequent appeal against this decision was submitted and the Inspector in his letter dated February 2006 dismissed the appeal. (hard copy to be provided) ▪ In his letter the Inspector supports the first reason for refusal in that the dwellings contribute to the residential scale and form of the buildings on this side of the road at this point and help to screen the canopy and garage from view. ▪ With regard to the second issue, to which the question relates, the Inspector concluded that on the basis of what is contained in the representations there is no evidence to support the Council's contention that the dwellings can be economically refurbished and could not support the Council's case on the second reason for refusal. ▪ In dismissing the appeal no conditions were imposed or reference made to a 'habitable' order. ▪ In correspondence last year the appellant company was encouraged to proceed with consideration of the grants available at that time (Empty
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		<p>Property Grant) but it is understood that this was not followed up with the appropriate Environmental Health officer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is not considered to be any further action that can be taken under the Planning Acts to put the properties back into a habitable condition. <p>OUTCOME - that officers investigate possible alternative course of action (other than through Planning legislation) to bring Queen Street Cottages and other empty properties back into habitable use.</p>
<p>28.08.07</p>	<p>Freedom Of Information Act (FIA) - What checks do North Herts District Council have in place to ensure any ruling made under the Freedom of Information Act is correct.</p>	<p>NHDC operates in accordance with the Freedom of Information Policy and guidance from the Information Commissioner. NHDC have officers trained and many years experience of case handling .Their role is to deal with the initial request and the process of preparing and issuing a response. Any technical response (and/or information relating to the request will be provided by the Head of Service responsible for the enquiry. Where necessary additional legal advice will be sort. This information is displayed on the NHDC website.</p> <p>OUTCOME - the following supplementary question was asked:</p> <p>“What checks and balances have been put in place for the future to address the failure to deal with the above Freedom of Information request in the correct manner in the first instance?”</p> <p>A response be provided by officers direct to Councillor Clark.</p>
<p>28.08.07</p>	<p>What process of vetting does North Herts use to ensure those attempting to enter into a contractual and Tender agreements with us in regard to their financial and ethical standards?</p>	<p>We check the legislative compliance of contractors, eg anti-discrimination legislation and H & S, and provide a clause to ensure they comply with the relevant legislation. We also provide them with our Whistle blowing policy but there is no check on their ethical standards - this is not always a relevant matter as companies operate under a very different framework.</p> <p>There are a number of approaches made by the Council to ensure those attempting to enter into a contractual agreement with us in regard to their financial and ethical standards meet the Council’s expectations and help reduce the risk of future contractual failure:</p> <p>Where contracts for the supply of services or works are sought and as a means of reducing the number of tenders at an early stage of the process, the Council favours the use of a pre-qualification questionnaire (PQQ). The document is designed to support an “ad hoc select list” or “restricted tendering procedure”, where notice/adverts is given to invite contractors to express their interest in being selected to tender. They are then required to fill in one of</p>

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		<p>these questionnaires, and the replies are used to evaluate the capability and standing of contractors and to assist in the process of selecting those to be invited to tender.</p> <p>Sections within the questionnaire cover matters relating to financial and anti-discrimination standards.</p> <p>Where land or property contracts are involved an informal tendering process is adopted where matters listed in the PQQ are dealt with through a process of interview and or correspondence.</p> <p>With both methods where possible information supplied by the tenderers is checked at some stage of the evaluation process, examples are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conduct a financial evaluation of the tenderers on their published/audited accounts. ▪ Confirm the identity of the company (or other legal entity) which it is proposed to enter into a contract or lease with and what their status is. ▪ Ensure that sufficient guarantees and references have been obtained and what the relationship of the guarantors/referees is to the tenderers. ▪ When applicable, establish that there is a viable and realistic business plan and that all necessary sources of funding have been identified and put in place. <p>OUTCOME - the Committee noted the answers given, but a number of Members expressed continued concerns about the robustness of the Council's tendering process, and the apparent pre-eminence given to the financial standing of contractors over their business standing.</p>
<p>28.08.07</p>	<p>Community Assets - The Big Lottery Fund are having a number of Regional Seminars to inform Local Authorities of the details of the £30 Million Community Asset Fund. Has this authority received its invitation and will anyone be attending the Eastern Regional Seminar on 4th September 2007. If someone from this authority is attending what will then happen to the information received and how will Councillors be informed?</p>	<p>The Council has received an invitation from the Big Lottery Fund (BLF) regarding the Community Assets Programme and will be attending, together with representatives from the third sector (voluntary and community), the Eastern Regional Seminar on 4th September in Cambridge.</p> <p>The purpose of the seminars is to outline the key elements of the programme but also for potential applicants to ask questions and feed into the process, eg: about the funding criteria.</p>

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		<p>When the details of the Community Assets programme have been finalised by BLF these can be made available to all Councillors via MIS.</p> <p>The Council will then need to consider whether it wishes to prepare an application (or applications) to the BLF as part of the programme.</p> <p>The Council is also preparing a report on the Quirk Review and any changes that this might mean to the current asset disposal strategy.</p> <p>OUTCOME - the following supplementary question was asked:</p> <p>“Which body of the Council would be empowered to consider whether it wishes to prepare an application (or applications) for submission to the BLF?”</p> <p>RESOLVED - That a response be provided by officers.</p>
<p>28.08.07</p>	<p>Following the decision by this Council to sign up to the Nottingham Declaration on Climate change at its meeting on January 18th 2007, what actions has this Council taken to take a lead in and reduce its carbon emissions?</p>	<p>The signing of the Nottingham Declaration by the Authority in 2007 made an express commitment by the Council to deliver actions which could make a positive impact on our local sustainability and contribute to the national climate change, recycling and green issues agenda.</p> <p>Part of that commitment was to produce a climate change strategy within two years of signing up to the Declaration and it is intended, and indeed within the Policy/Partnerships and Performance service plan, that the development of the strategy will commence in March 2008; the team are currently working on the development of the Sustainable Community Strategy, the highest level strategic document for the authority and its partners, to be presented to Cabinet in February.</p> <p>In preparation for the creation of that strategy, I have been successful in securing the services of an excellent research student, working alongside the PPP team for the last two months, under my direction. This student is in the process of preparing for us a detailed report which will cover;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Examples of good practice from other ‘beacon’ authorities which North Herts could consider adopting ▪ Research evidence regarding persuading communities and individuals to change their current habits for new initiatives and whether incentives for those changes are also required ▪ Evidence regarding North Herts’ current carbon footprint and areas where

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		<p>actions (often small) can make most impact on the future carbon emissions for the district</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review of current evidence of aspects to be tackled, using the Government's new 'Getting on Target' toolkit, which identifies the considerable number of areas on which the Council will need to concentrate to bring about change; these range from motivating staff to alter their working habits, travel to work, use of resources etc through the purchase of fuel and efficiency of buildings to the use of volunteers and community sector organisations to promote the message wider. <p>Whilst we know that the Government target for climate change and carbon, methane etc reductions for 2020 are already available, we are also awaiting a number of other measures which will be introduced next year as part of our Comprehensive Area Assessment, the replacement for CPA (Comprehensive Performance Assessment); it is therefore important that the timing of agreement for a final strategy should align with those targets being established by central government in order to be most effective.</p> <p>There will also be a requirement placed on Heads of Service to integrate climate change into their service plans from April 2008, in order that the capacity and resource to take this issue forward is fully considered by all service areas. A working group to develop the strategy will be convened in March 2008.</p> <p>However, I can assure members that we cannot simply 'park' green issues and deal with them as the workload permits, since often circumstances require us to act more quickly, and I list below a number of actions currently underway which will in turn form part of the overall Climate Change Strategy for the authority;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We are advocating the use of reusable bags, and reducing the impact of plastic carriers going to landfill. Our waste team are distributing a considerable number of jute shopping bags in support of this initiative. ▪ We are continuing to promote our British Gas Insulation Scheme, including targeted advertising on envelopes used for bus pass renewal etc. ▪ We have built in sustainability requirements to the regeneration schemes at Ivel Court and Westmill ▪ All social housing is now required to achieve the Housing Corporation ECO3 standard ▪ We are already running, and have increased, recycling workshops within schools
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We will introduce the recycling of kitchen waste into our waste collection scheme in early 2008, reducing further the tonnage sent to landfill ▪ We are working through the Herts Waste Partnership to lobby government for more stringent targets to be imposed on suppliers to reduce their use of non-recyclable packaging, and over-packaging in general ▪ Our Local Development Framework and Local Transport Plans, are currently being prepared in line with new sustainability guidance ▪ It is proposed that our People Strategy, dealing with the employment, skills and requirements placed on our staff, will be reviewed and that a complimentary green travel plan for staff will become part of that document. ▪ The Authority has already promoted the government 'Bikes for Work' scheme and hopes to extend this further in the future; we are also providing the opportunity for those officers who can work flexibly, either from home or mobile across the district visiting homes, etc, to do so, thus reducing unnecessary travel (by either customers or officers) and therefore ultimately carbon emissions. ▪ We have established a 'Green Issues' Officer group to develop effective means by which we can reduce our carbon footprint by developing new ways of working – reducing unnecessary printing, promoting recycling within Council buildings, as well as promoting the sustainable consumer message to staff who shop locally.
<p>09.10.07</p>	<p>In other areas where housing costs are high, councils have helped to deliver significant levels of shared equity and/or shared ownership affordable housing. What proportion of new affordable housing in North Herts is shared equity or shared ownership, how does this compare with similar districts (both within Hertfordshire and beyond) and what can be done to increase provision of this sort?</p>	<p>This table shows that from the schemes to date (Summer last year) the Authority was achieving 70% rented and 30% shared ownership.</p> <p>It must be noted that the development process, from inception through to development on site, has a time lag of about 18 months, so schemes being development in 03/04 and 04/05 would not have been processed in light of the information received in the 2002 housing needs survey (i.e. the need for a 65 / 35% split in tenure type). The latest information would have fed into the new schemes from 05/ 06 onwards. Therefore only two units of shared ownership units completed in a total of 118 units was completed between 03/04 and 04/05, however since 2005/06 the %ratio has increased to the levels indicated. (this figure does fluctuate due to the Programme completion of the units, for example on the Hitchin Lavender Fields site the rented units were handed over in the last financial year where as the shared ownership and a few rented flats have been handed over this financial year).</p>

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		North Herts Affordable Housing Programme: 2003/04 - 2007/08						
		<u>Summary table of rented and shared ownership units</u>						
		Rent		Sale		Total		
		No.	% all rent	No.	% all sale	No.	% all total	
		Flats						
		1 bed	131	32%	51	30%	182	32%
		2 bed	40	10%	82	48%	122	21%
		Houses						
		1 bed	10	2%	1	1%	11	2%
		2 bed	111	27%	30	18%	141	24%
		3 bed	76	19%	6	4%	82	14%
		4 bed	20	5%	-	-	20	3%
		7 bed	1	0%	-	-	1	0%
		Bungalows						
		1 bed	4	1%	-	-	4	1%
		2 bed	12	3%	-	-	12	2%
		3 bed	1	0%	-	-	1	0%
		All	406	100%	170	100%	576	100%
		% total	70%		30%		100%	
		Note: table excludes units of other tenure Produced July 2006						
11.12.07	Following assurances given at a Full Council meeting, what steps have been taken to find a site in Hitchin for the Mobile Breast Cancer Unit for 2008?	I must first clarify for all officers and councillors that the screening cycle carried out by the mobile scanning units, and certainly that placed in Hitchin, is part of a three yearly programme. The most recent 15 week screening, which took place at Coreys Mill, Sainsburys, was completed in August 2007, and the scanner will therefore not require a Hitchin location until the summer of 2010.						

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		<p>Since the Full Council meeting we have further investigated a site at the back of Hitchin Swim Centre, which could potentially also have the hard standing and electrics which the new digital equipment used next time will require; however, there are issues that have been identified with the provision of the (now single phase) electrical supply and access for emergency service vehicles which still need to be resolved.</p> <p>The Manager of the Leisure Centre is in communication with the Health Trust and the two parties are discussing these issues with a view to reaching agreement. I will be able to inform members further once I know of the outcome of those discussions.</p>
11.12.07	<p>Hitchin Town Hall</p> <p>In regard to the "Market Testing - Tender" exercise process for Hitchin Town Hall, I would like to ask the following:-</p> <p>a) What was the cost of Officer time for this process?</p> <p>b) What was the total of the other costs involved in the process?</p>	<p>a) The Council does not hold the costs of officer time for the 'market testing' exercise undertaken for the Hitchin Town Hall during 2007. It is not custom and practice for the majority of officers to cost their time on an hourly basis to projects of this nature, but rather they plan their involvement as required to complete the task.</p> <p>b) Similarly, aside from the actual costs of placing the marketing details in the relevant journals, all the 'other costs' are not readily accessible as they are incorporated into general functions such as the printing of Committee reports, where the costs of each individual report are not disaggregated.</p> <p>OUTCOME - that it be regretted that precise cost information regarding officer time spent on the Hitchin Town Hall Market Testing exercise is not available, but that officers report back to the Committee with an indicative estimate of such costs.</p> <p>That a report be submitted to the Scrutiny Finance Sub-Group providing details as to how officer time is allocated/costed generally.</p>
11.12.07	<p>Civic Reception</p> <p>What was the cost of the Civic Reception in 2007 and what is the budget for 2008?</p>	<p>The Actual Budget for the 2007 Civic Reception was £3,652.97, and the working Budget for the 2008 Civic Reception is £3,140."</p>
11.12.07	<p>Hitchin Town Hall</p> <p>The Audit Commission wrote to our CEO on 2nd October 2007 in regard to Hitchin Town Hall and the Market Testing - Tender Process. The Audit Commission requested a reply by 16th October, what reply did the CEO send to this letter?</p>	<p>Following receipt of a letter from a member of the public to the District Auditor regarding Hitchin Town Hall, the District Auditor requested the Council's response. On 15 October 2007, the Chief Executive provided a detailed response, which included confidential information. No response from the District Auditor to this letter has been received by the Chief executive to date.</p>

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		<p>The following extract is taken from the minutes of the Scrutiny meeting held on 22.01.08 which follows on from this question. "...<i>Councillor Paul Clark stated that he had received subsequent advice from the Head of Legal & Democratic Services that, in her opinion; there was nothing in this letter which remained confidential. She had explained that the issue of confidentiality had to be considered in the light of relevant factors applying at the time, and that the content of the letter included reference to matters which were to be considered in a Part II report at Cabinet the following evening (16 October 2007). As those facts, about the decision not to proceed further with the tenderers, were now publicly known, she had advised that, hence, there was no confidentiality which applied</i>".</p>
22.01.08	Given that our recycled newspapers go to Aylesford and our garden waste to Cumberlow Green, where does our plastic recycling go and what is it used for?	All plastic waste is collected via our contractor Recresco and taken to Mansfield in Nottinghamshire where it is processed and made into plastic park / on-street furniture, posts, bollards etc.
22.01.08	How much financially is being put aside to publicise the change to the brown bin scheme to allow food waste to be included, when the in-vessel composting arrangements have finally been sorted?	Publicity for the move to include in-vessel composting within our collection arrangements will need to be contained within present budgets.
22.01.08	In advising residents of the change to the bin collections in the District what percentage of households across the district were advised of this change?	All district residents should have received the publicity DVD, Booklet and collection calendar. There was extensive communication through local newspapers, Outlook magazine and via broadcast media
22.01.08	What arrangements have been put in place and at what cost to collect recycling items from Flats and Houses of Multiple Occupation?	Recycling from flats and multiple occupancy dwellings is currently being investigated by the waste services team to determine the best methodology. Once the options and costs have been produced the option that provides best value will be selected.
22.01.08	What evidence base did this Council use to justify the lack of a dedicated Toilet Provision for Women in the new refurbished Arcade toilets in Hitchin?	<p>The refurbished toilets at the Arcade have been designed to enable greater access for more people. The nature of the unisex design is one that is being used in many new public conveniences. The old style of toilets with male and female split can encourage anti-social behaviour, which is difficult to manage. The new design ensures each cubicle is separate, therefore, reduces the level of anti-social behaviour, enables parents to supervise their children easier which ensures better management control.</p> <p>The male-only facilities are restricted to gender because they consist of urinals only. Based on specialist research the configuration of toilets provided has been designed to maximise the opportunities available to all users and restrict waiting times.</p>

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		<p>Although the Council has received some complaints regarding the new toilets, we have also received a similar amount of compliments.</p> <p>The British Toilet Association is Britain's leading organisation that is representative of many local authorities and the private sector that as an interest in public toilets. Their web site is: www.britloos.co.uk</p> <p>One of the main suppliers that have a linked web site is www.interpublicurbansystems.co.uk/home.htm</p> <p>Although NHDC have not used their products, there web site illustrates the changes from the old to the new ways of provision. All examples, show unisex provision with direct access and separate male urinals</p>																									
22.01.08	What Health & Safety audit was conduct by this Council prior to the decision to install door opening on to a public through fare at the new toilet facility in the Arcade in Hitchin?	<p>Many factors were taken into consideration regarding the design and style of new toilet provision at the arcade toilets. One of the main factors is the design and size of the facilities was to improve customer safety and accessibility. Most of the modern designs that are currently being used to replace public toilets have toilet doors opening outwards.</p> <p>We believe that the new facilities incorporates good design principles and are far safer and accessible for the public than the old.</p>																									
22.01.08	Please could we be updated as to the continuance of the work of the various Visioning Groups. In particular, when did each of them last meet formally, when were their Action Plans last updated, how many of their intended projects which were due to be completed by December 2007 were completed and how many still are unfinished, what is the total (aggregated for all years to date) of the budgets (revenue and capital) for each which have been spent to date, and what budgets remain unspent?	<p><u>1. Visioning Funding</u></p> <p>The Area Visioning programme was time limited to four years April 2002 – March 2006. The budget allocation each year was £50,000 revenue, allocated on a pro-rata demographic basis. The capital allocation was £375,000 As of 30.01.08, the budget position is:</p> <p>Revenue Budgets</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Area Committee</th> <th>Allocation</th> <th>Committed (not spent)</th> <th>Spent</th> <th>Unallocated</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Letchworth</td> <td>55,570</td> <td>11354</td> <td>39,867</td> <td>4,410</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Hitchin</td> <td>59,850</td> <td>3,010</td> <td>56,840</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Baldock</td> <td>34,210</td> <td>1,053</td> <td>33,157</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Royston</td> <td>17,709</td> <td>1,493</td> <td>16,216</td> <td>0</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Area Committee	Allocation	Committed (not spent)	Spent	Unallocated	Letchworth	55,570	11354	39,867	4,410	Hitchin	59,850	3,010	56,840	0	Baldock	34,210	1,053	33,157	0	Royston	17,709	1,493	16,216	0
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Baldock	34,210	1,053	33,157	0																							
Royston	17,709	1,493	16,216	0																							

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		S. Rural	35,405	5,910	29,495	0
		Capital Budgets				
		Area Committee	Allocation	Committed (not spent)	Spent	Unallocated
		Letchworth	120,100	75,232	28,000	16,355
		Hitchin	112,600	110,350	0	2,250
		Baldock	75,000	75,000	75,000	0
		Royston	62,700	62,700	0	0
		S. Rural	79,600	41,900	5,000	32,700
		<u>2. Area Work Programmes</u>				
		<p>Each Area Committee did develop a three year work programme, based on the initial visioning consultation. These programmes were last formally reviewed during November to February 2005/6. Thereafter, all the outstanding projects that were deemed achievable were transferred to the Area Committee report / budget process.</p> <p>Monitoring of progress on these issues is now carried out at Area Committee meetings, via the Champion News and Delegated Budget reports.</p> <p>As part of the implementation of the new Sustainable Community Strategy, consideration is being given to refreshing the work programme approach for Area Committees.</p>				
		<u>3. Visioning Groups</u>				
		<p>Each Area Committee developed its own approach to visioning and not all set up specific visioning groups.</p> <p>Baldock - The original visioning group became the Baldock Bypass Consultation Group which evolved into the Town Centre Stakeholder Consultation Group that meets periodically to address Town Centre Developments and the Town Partnership Group that meets monthly to look at initiatives of raising the Town's profile with regards to business and tourism.</p>				

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		<p>Revenue commitments and expenditure:</p> <p>Consultants for Land associated to By-Pass £23,400 Streetscene Improvements (HH funding) £14,000 Town Centre Conservation Area £1,275 Tree Works £4,500</p> <p>Capital commitments and expenditure:</p> <p>Feasibility study for new railings £15,000 Two CCTV cameras £60,000</p> <p>Hitchin - Established 3 local visioning groups – Youth, Transport and Planning.</p> <p>The last formal meeting of the Planning Group was in June 2006 and there remain a number of outstanding issues, eg: Churchgate.</p> <p>The 2020 Transport Vision for Hitchin was presented to Hitchin Area Committee in March 2007 by the Visioning Transport Sub Committee.</p> <p>The Youth Visioning Group became the Voice of Hitchin Youth and still meets on a regular basis.</p> <p>Revenue commitments and expenditure:</p> <p>Woodside Screening £10,544 Town Centre Strategy £ 927 Visioning Presentations £443 BMX Dirt Bike Track £1,372 Tree Planting Butts Close £1,500 Voice of Hitchin Youth £1,500 Churchgate Project £2,635 Community Centre leaflet £700 Cabbies Hut, Market Place £1,300 Community Centres Leaflet £700</p> <p>Capital commitments and expenditure:</p> <p>Refurbishment/rebuild of Bancroft Hall (£67,500) & improvements to Windmill Hill (£42,850).</p>
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		<p>Southern Rural - No specific visioning group has met. There were visioning representatives pre 2003 who fed in to the overarching Visioning document. To develop the Rural Strategy (2004/5) , a Rural Members Group and multi-agency Strategic Rural Partnership Group were established, but these have not met since 2006.</p> <p>All Parish Councils/Parish Meetings are consulted on many district wide issues/strategies and there is an annual Rural Parish and Town Council Conference.</p> <p>Revenue commitments and expenditure:</p> <p>Reduce vandalism in Breachwood Green, St Ippolyts and Kimpton £3,000 Drugs and alcohol project for young people £500 Anti fly tipping measures £2,000 Produce Village Halls booklet £1,350 Rural detached outreach youth provision £6,000</p> <p>Capital commitment and expenditure:</p> <p>SCooTS 2 Wheels Scheme £15k.</p> <p>Letchworth - The original visioning group was wound up as a result of the evolving a Town Council and the Letchworth Town Centre Partnership.</p> <p>Revenue commitments & expenditure:</p> <p>The Grange Improvement Forum £500 The Grange Youth Club £10,190 Jackman's Youth Initiatives £6,263 Street Tree Planting £5,000 Letchworth Youth Council £2,000</p> <p>Capital commitments & expenditure:</p> <p>New Youth Facility within the proposed Ivel Court development £30,000 The Grange Community Garden Project £45,745 Letchworth Open Air Pool – enhancement works £28,000</p> <p>Royston - Set up one visioning group of about 11 people, ranging from 15 to 80 plus.</p>
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		<p>Revenue commitments and expenditure:</p> <p>Young People's events £4,000 Bus stop seating £1,400 Royston Town Council – East of England £2,000 Youth Council £790</p> <p>Capital commitments and expenditure:</p> <p>£62,700 to transport related projects.</p> <p><u>4. Outstanding Projects</u></p> <p>Other than those listed below, all projects identified through visioning are either completed, ongoing or mainstreamed.</p> <p>Baldock - The Area Committee committed the remaining revenue balances of the visioning programme to the future Town Centre enhancements £2,470 (this was area committee visioning, not main visioning)</p> <p>Letchworth - Unallocated capital funds of £16,355 are being proposed for a range of projects associated with Norton Common .</p> <p>Youth Activities Wilbury Area £5,000</p> <p>S. Rural</p> <p>Revenue visioning - £1k project for volunteers yet to complete, £4,150 agreed (£3,368 yet to allocate) in support of Parish Plans, £990 underspend against Village Halls Networking events as project now completed. Awaiting re-allocated project</p> <p>Capital visioning - £32,700 yet to allocate on other projects.</p>
01.04.08	<p>On 15 March 2005 Cabinet recommended to Council that a more detailed Social Inclusion Action Plan is prepared following consultation with partner agencies, the Local Strategic Partnership and Area Committees prior to submission back to Cabinet later in 2005. The recommendation was accepted by Council on 26 April 2005. Could you please explain what actions have taken place since then?</p>	<p>I apologise that it has not been possible to provide a full response for this meeting.</p> <p>The social inclusion action plan which should have been agreed by the end of December 2005 was not completed because of competing demands on resources.</p>

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		<p>However various actions relevant to social inclusion have been and are being undertaken. For example officers have already mapped the local results from the new Index of Multiple Deprivation which was published in December 2007.</p> <p>A meeting is in the process of being arranged with officers to discuss a full response and the way forward for this important work. This will help us explore the nature of social inclusion in North Hertfordshire. It could be said that social inclusion will be achieved when all the risk factors associated with social exclusion (e.g. low income, unemployment, poor health, poor living conditions, low educational attainment) have been addressed <u>and</u> when democratic engagement / community cohesion / citizenship have been enhanced.</p> <p>I will circulate a further response once this meeting has taken place.</p>
<p>01.04.08</p>	<p>In view of the slippage of a number of strategy reports to cabinet, is sufficient attention being given to prioritising the strategic management of the authority to ensure that leading officers and elected members are able to make their contributions?</p>	<p>The Council is required to publish a forward plan each month to give brief details of the key decisions it is likely to take over the following four month period. The plan is an indication of a possible decision time frame and is intended to raise public and member awareness of potential key decisions. The plan is reviewed by the Corporate Management Team prior to its publication.</p> <p>Following concerns raised by the Scrutiny Committee about some items appearing late on the forward plan, the Corporate Management Team considered how the process could be improved to maximise the period of notice given. It was considered prudent to ensure that items appear on the plan in good time and slip rather than appear on the plan late. As a result, all report writing officers were instructed by the Corporate Management Team to ensure that they erred on the side of caution and put things on the plan with an anticipated earliest possible date for decision. In doing this, it was recognised that items might slip from the indicated date and it was considered better to have public awareness of the potential for a decision to be taken rather than risk criticism for lack of notice. The Forward Plan provides contact details for an officer and the relevant portfolio holder and this enables Members and the public to make early contact on items of interest to them.</p> <p>The Forward Plan published for the 1st March 2008 showed the following strategies due for consideration by Cabinet at its April meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green Space Strategy • Revised Rural Strategy • Climate Change Strategy • Communications Strategy

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Review of Procurement Strategy • Housing Strategy <p>In all cases the appropriate portfolio holder has been kept informed of progress and in some instances the items have slipped as a result of additional questions raised by the portfolio holders.</p> <p>The April Cabinet meeting now has a report outlining the approach to the Climate Change Strategy and the review of the Procurement Strategy is being dealt with under delegated powers by the Finance Portfolio holder and will be considered by the Finance Scrutiny sub group on 31st March.</p> <p>In terms of those strategies which have slipped , the Green Space Strategy needs to tie in with the LDF timetable and members of Scrutiny will be aware that consultants were appointed to carry out necessary work. When officers reviewed the work provided by the consultants, they were unhappy with the quality and, following consultation with the portfolio holders have required the consultants to redo the work. This has had implications for the timetable and the report is now expected to come to the June Cabinet.</p> <p>The Revised Rural Strategy is the incorrect description of the decision required and has been corrected for the April Forward plan. The actual piece of work required is a review of the rural strategy action plan in light of the outcomes of the Working with Parishes Task and Finish Group. This work has been delayed by staff absences in the Policy, Partnerships and Performance team and redirection of available resources to focus on work on the Sustainable Communities Strategy consultation. A meeting is being arranged with the Community Engagement portfolio holder to review the position in time for a report to June Cabinet.</p> <p>The Communications Strategy is being improved at the request of the portfolio holder, Councillor Strong, who had raised some queries on the draft strategy and asked officers to carry out some further work. It is anticipated that the June Cabinet should receive the report.</p> <p>The draft Housing Strategy was produced and is currently out for consultation. The original plan saw the consultation end in time for report to April Cabinet. Following representations from Parish Councils and discussion with the Housing portfolio holder, the consultation period has been extended to allow a greater opportunity for interested parties to respond and this meant that it was not possible to meet the deadlines for reporting to April Cabinet.</p>
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		Therefore the answer to the question is yes and as explained above some of the timetable changes actually allow more time for people to contribute to these important issues.																																								
01.04.08	How well is the authority meeting its standards for the removal of graffiti and are these standards sufficiently challenging to meet the aspirations of residents?	<p>ANALYSIS OF GRAFFITI 2006/7 AND 2007/8 Snapshot taken from Council database</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th colspan="2">2006/2007</th> <th colspan="2">2007/8 (still ongoing)</th> </tr> <tr> <th></th> <th>Incidents</th> <th>Notification of cleaned & closed cases</th> <th>Incidents</th> <th>Notification of cleaned & closed cases</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>NHDC owned</td> <td>49</td> <td>49</td> <td>102</td> <td>76^{*(1)}</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Private</td> <td>220</td> <td>160</td> <td>319</td> <td>209^{*(2)}</td> </tr> <tr> <td>TOTAL</td> <td>269</td> <td>209</td> <td>421</td> <td>285</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Priority 1 (extreme racist graffiti) Policy: to clean within 1 hr</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Priority 2 (other racist/offensive graffiti) Policy:to clean within 24 hours</td> <td>5</td> <td>5</td> <td>2</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Priority 3 (general graffiti that is not racist, offensive or poses danger: on NHDC property: policy to clean within 7 days of report on private property: to clean within 14 days of permission being granted</td> <td>47 216</td> <td></td> <td>102 317</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		2006/2007		2007/8 (still ongoing)			Incidents	Notification of cleaned & closed cases	Incidents	Notification of cleaned & closed cases	NHDC owned	49	49	102	76 ^{*(1)}	Private	220	160	319	209 ^{*(2)}	TOTAL	269	209	421	285	Priority 1 (extreme racist graffiti) Policy: to clean within 1 hr	1	1	0	0	Priority 2 (other racist/offensive graffiti) Policy:to clean within 24 hours	5	5	2	2	Priority 3 (general graffiti that is not racist, offensive or poses danger: on NHDC property: policy to clean within 7 days of report on private property: to clean within 14 days of permission being granted	47 216		102 317	
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		<p>*⁽¹⁾ With graffiti on NHDC properties, cleaning is always actioned but cases are not closed until notification of actual cleaning is received. Sometimes Youth Offenders' team are commissioned; NHDC need to accept that when they clean, this cannot meet the 7 day target.</p> <p>*⁽²⁾ With graffiti on all private properties; this is notified to owners, where known. NHDC will offer to clean subject to written permission via signed indemnity form. With residential properties, owners are offered a free cleaning service. On commercial property we have built up a contact list and we notify owners. A quote is offered although some large companies have their own maintenance teams (electrical/rail) and will not instruct us to clean nor will they notify us when they have carried out cleaning. Therefore cases have to remain open for long time. However we are proactive & have negotiated with NTL and are in process of agreeing a cleansing policy with HCC to clean their underpasses. With other HCC depts and companies eg NHH and Transco we have built up an adhoc arrangement for cleaning. Hence number of incidents on database have increased.</p> <p>The public are encouraged to report graffiti on our website and the current copy of Outlook, which has already gone to print, re-affirms how the public can inform us of graffiti. They can contact us by via phone, post or email. Each incident is photographed and placed on database (as evidence, in case prosecution results) and NHDC will then endeavour to arrange cleaning. Enviro-Crime audit will soon be published that will provide an independent view of this service. Funding has not been an issue with regard to graffiti.</p>
01.04.08	<p>This Council now has experience of a few "No Cold Call Zones" in the District. What plans do we have with the Police to create them in other areas of the District where they are needed such as the Oakfield Estate in Hitchin?</p>	<p>Hertfordshire Constabulary have been working with the local Crime Disorder and Reduction Partnership, in particular Trading Standards, to introduce NCCZ as a tactical response to Bogus Caller, Rogue Trader and Artifice Burglary.</p> <p>A NCCZ gives out a message to would be criminals that the door will not be answered unless prior arrangements have been made. Neighbourhood Watch Schemes (NHW) operate within the Zones and the residents look out for each other. The Zones are a way of empowering a local community. The residents within the Zones receive additional support from the Police by way of increased patrols, additionally vulnerable residents are referred to the Easter Area 'Safe' scheme where a representative of 'SAFE' will fit any locks and bolts required, additionally smoke alarm referrals are made. Trading Standards are very involved and offer a hot line for reporting to residents.</p>

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		<p>When deciding where a NCCZ is to be placed firstly Hot Spots are determined as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ The analysing of Bogus Caller, Rogue Trader and Artifice Burglary activity (Any Repeat Victimisation)➤ The demographics of the Area, identifying where clusters of older more vulnerable people live (This is important as over 70's are at a greater risk of these crime types) <p>This alone is not enough information to constitute a zone. The residents within the Zone must be committed to it's introduction and be involved in NHW. Therefore resident surveys are an important part of the implementation process.</p> <p>To date the cost of zones have been supported by Trading Standards and the Police. However each time a zone is introduced the funding has to be sought. The funding pays for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Signage➤ Customer packs, providing key contact numbers, stickers for doors and other crime prevention / Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) advice.➤ Public consultation➤ Post evaluation <p>Our Neighbouring County of Bedfordshire have announced the whole County as a NCCZ, however this approach has raised some concerns within Whitehall as the decision not to allow people to knock at the door should be one the resident makes rather than the local CDRP. Trading Standards are not advised to operate in this manner , nor would they not be able to cope with the increase in calls. Hertfordshire Constabulary are in agreement that a targeted approach is the best and most effective way forward.</p> <p>NCCZ are currently in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Knebworth➤ Codicote <p>There are plans to add NCCZ to the areas listed below during 2008. These areas have been identified through the analysis stated above, however residents commitment still needs to be sought.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Hitchwood➤ Gravely
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Wymondley ➤ Kimpton
<p>01.04.08</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ When will the dangerous bring bank in St Johns Road be removed or resited to a suitable position? ▪ What steps are being taken to ensure that bring banks are not left full for several days allowing overflow plastics to build up? ▪ Are considerations being given to providing fencing to ensure that any overflow at bring banks can be left tidily and safely? 	<p>The current siting of the Plastic Bottle bank at St John's Road will not be changed. The site has been deemed safe as from a servicing point of view and more importantly a public use perspective. We do understand that loose plastic bottles do and will cause a safety hazard if left blowing around the street in the dark. A cleansing team will be sent asap to the site to ensure all loose items are removed from site.</p> <p>It is often not the case that the banks are full, more that residents who dump full bags of bottles at the base of banks give the impression that the banks are full. Once one resident has left bags in this manner more have the same idea and the problem grows.</p> <p>However, we will look at the servicing frequency to ensure banks with perceived problems are serviced at a frequency to ensure adequate capacity within the bank at all times.</p> <p>Fencing is not recommended at such Bring sites as this encourages fly tipping and other anti-social behaviour behind the screens which are often dark and provide suitable conditions for other environmental crimes e.g. graffiti etc. On-going costs of replacing smashed fencing is very expensive and often when left in a smashed state causes greater Health and Safety issues than if not provided at all.</p>