

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

Meeting held at Council Offices, Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City
on Tuesday, 20 October 2009 at 8.00pm

Minutes

PRESENT: *Councillors F.J. Smith (Chairman), T.W. Hone (Vice-Chairman), Tom Brindley, Tricia Cowley, I.J. Knighton, Bernard Lovewell, Mrs L.A. Needham and Mrs C.P.A. Strong.*

IN ATTENDANCE: *Chief Executive, Strategic Director of Customer Services, Strategic Director of Planning, Housing & Enterprise, Head of Finance, Performance & Asset Management, Head of Community & Cultural Services, Parks & Countryside Development Manager, Regional & Strategic Sites Manager, Cultural Services Manager, Transport Policy Officer, Acting Corporate Legal Manager, Democratic Services Manager and Senior Committee & Member Services Officer.*

ALSO PRESENT: *Councillors L.W. Oliver (Chairman of Scrutiny Committee), Deepak Sangha (Vice-Chairman of Hitchin Committee), Michael Paterson (Chairman of Letchworth Committee), Mrs A.G. Ashley, D.J. Barnard, David Billing, J.M. Cunningham, Fiona Hill, A.F. Hunter, Sal Jarvis, S.K. Jarvis, David Kearns, Lorna Kercher, Joan Kirby, David Levett, R.L. Shakespeare-Smith, Martin Stears-Handscorn, R.A.C. Thake and Michael Weeks.
41 members of the public.*

59. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

60. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 8 September 2009 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and signed by the Chairman.

61. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

There was no notification of other business.

62. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.

63. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Cabinet was addressed by a number of speakers in respect of Item 7 on the agenda - Hitchin Town Hall: Museum Feasibility Study (see Minute 68 below).

(i) Mr David Rice – on behalf of Hitchin Art Club

With the aid of Powerpoint slides, Mr Rice presented a scheme for the extension of the existing Hitchin Museum at Paynes Park, Hitchin, as an alternative to the conversion of Hitchin Town Hall to a new Museum.

Mr Rice stated that the Museum and Library on the Paynes Park site co-existed with mutual benefit; that the NHDC proposal was unpopular and had caused feelings of resentment to current users of Hitchin Town Hall; and that the NHDC proposal would be the worst possible scenario, causing the loss of community use at Hitchin Town Hall and constraining the Museum collection into an unsuitable layout. He stated that the current Hitchin Museum was a listed building, which had been gifted with

covenants for use as a museum, and that the 3 individual buildings (Museum, Library and Town Hall) had their own function and each added valuable cultural context to Hitchin.

Mr Rice considered that the present state of Hitchin Town Hall derived from neglect of building fabric and lack of marketing by the Council, and many groups had therefore deserted it. This downward spiral must be arrested and reversed. If Museum and Town Hall were properly managed, Hitchin would attract even more visitors to enjoy the town's facilities, and it would justly thrive. For Hitchin Art Club, it was very important that the existing Museum remained, and was extended on its current site in partnership with the Library.

The Chairman thanked Mr Rice for his presentation.

(ii) Mr Chris Parker – on behalf of Keep Hitchin Special

Mr Parker commented that the current proposal represented the remnants of the Council's attempt to retain some element of Hitchin Town Hall for community use, following the failure of the tender exercise to redevelop the property in 2006, and the subsequent failure of the Hitchin Initiative bid for Lottery funding.

Mr Parker made the following points:

- The building was largely acceptable in terms of the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act, as most areas were accessible at street level;
- Conversion of the Main Hall to Museum space would mean that there would be no venue in Hitchin to accommodate events of 500+ people, and that the Town Hall was ideal as a venue for wedding receptions, particularly due to its proximity to the Registry Office;
- The Judo Club had used the premises for over 50 years, and had surely earned the right to remain;
- The Mothers and Toddlers Group used the Lucas Room and bar area during the week, and it was unclear whether this would be able to continue;
- The Annual Beer festival would no longer be able to continue in its current location;
- The property needs to be refurbished, but also needs to be properly marketed for community use – however, in spite of this, local groups continue to use all areas of the Town Hall because they consider it to be a good facility.

Mr Parker concluded by presenting a petition signed by over 5,000 residents, which stated:

"We, the undersigned, are determined to retain Hitchin Town hall as a fully-functioning community venue with its unique hall and stage, gymnasium, etc. Local Groups, Councillors and members of the public recognise that this building meets significant local needs.

We call upon North Hertfordshire District Councillors to leave the Town Hall as a Community Venue and to consider the transfer of this asset to the people of Hitchin for them to manage, thereby providing the revenue savings envisaged".

The Chairman thanked Mr Parker for his presentation.

(iii) Dr Leslie Mustoe – on behalf of Hitchin Forum

Dr Mustoe considered that there had been insufficient consultation regarding the proposal, and questioned why the Council's timescale for progressing the matter had been so tight. In respect of the "preferred option" identified in the report, he questioned who had identified this as primary option. He stated that the Facilities Working Group had not discussed any preferred options for museums, and he considered that alternative options should be explored.

Dr Mustoe felt that the architectural integrity of the Town Hall would be destroyed should the Feasibility Study be approved, and asked what would become of the

existing Hitchin Museum building should this be the case. He stated that the weight of local feeling believed that the Council was not willing to listen to the views expressed by residents regarding the future of the Town Hall.

Dr Mustoe concluded by commenting that neither the Letchworth Committee, Hitchin Committee nor Scrutiny Committee had supported the proposals, and he urged Cabinet Members to step back from the scheme (as urged by the Scrutiny Committee) and to continue discussions with the Hitchin Initiative and other local groups to pursue alternative options.

The Chairman thanked Dr Mustoe for his presentation.

(iv) Mr Brian Foreman – Hitchin resident

Mr Foreman expressed his concern about a serious threat to the architecture of Hitchin Town Hall should the Feasibility Study be approved. He considered it to be legalised vandalism. Mr Foreman outlined the architectural merits of the Town Hall and commented that, to insert a mezzanine level in the Main Hall would devastate the building – he considered that surely the main purpose of museums was to preserve heritage and not destroy it.

Mr Foreman stated that the value of the Town Hall complex as a community activity facility had yet to be fully realised. He was of the opinion that, with a management team similar to Plinston Hall in Letchworth Garden City, the Town Hall could be successful in combining community interests with commercial enterprise. He felt that a community trust would be the best solution.

Mr Foreman expounded the virtues of the Main Hall for use as a concert and exhibition venue. Whilst acknowledging that it would be feasible to use the Main Hall as a Museum, he asked at what cost would this be to the architectural integrity of the building and its loss to the community. What he considered to be less feasible was to create a 21st Century state of the art museum in an already 108 year old building.

Mr Foreman concluded by stating that the Council would be failing in its public duty in terms of best value if it did not give officers time to explore thoroughly all other possible options. Hitchin needed both a community centre and a museum in separate buildings.

The Chairman thanked Mr Foreman for his presentation.

(v) Mr Docwra and Mr Rutland – on behalf of residents in Grammar School Walk, Hitchin

Mr Docwra and Mr Rutland expressed the support of residents of Grammar School Walk to the proposal to convert the Main Hall into a museum facility. They outlined a number of problems they had experienced when the Main Hall had been in evening use for social gatherings, which included traffic obstructions, car noise, music noise, fire exits doors being left open, and anti-social behaviour. Many of the residents were elderly and had felt uncomfortable and unsafe in their own homes as a consequence of some of this activity.

Mr Docwra and Mr Rutland concluded by presenting a petition signed by 18 residents of Grammar School Walk, as follows:

“We, the residents of Grammar School Walk, would like to tell the Councillors of NHDC that we would very much like to see Hitchin Town Hall converted into a museum. We live opposite the back of the Town Hall, and have had ongoing problems with noise, food smells, parking and lack of respect for our property with some (not all) of the large functions that take place in the main hall. We gather that the gym and Lucas Room will remain in community use, and are happy with this, but think that a museum is an excellent use for this historic building.”

The Chairman thanked Mr Docwra and Mr Rutland for their presentations.

(vi) Ms Morag Norgan – Hitchin Initiative

Ms Norgan stated that the need for savings by NHDC was understood by the Hitchin Initiative and that there was a desire to work with NHDC towards a mutually beneficial outcome. However, she felt that it would be unwise for the Council to commit £3.5million to the project until the exact costs were known.

Ms Norgan advised that Cabinet should not ignore the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee, and urged councillors to make their individual decisions on this basis. Further time was needed to enable Members and officers, assisted by the Hitchin Initiative and other local groups, to arrive at a more viable solution for the future of the Town Hall and the Museums Service. Ms Norgan felt that, working together, a viable solution could be produced, that would pass scrutiny, within 24 months.

The Chairman thanked Ms Norgan for her presentation.

(vii) Councillor J.M. Cunningham

Councillor Cunningham began by stating that he considered that Local Authorities should provide both cultural and community facilities. He felt that the Feasibility Study was a very good piece of work, but his concern was not whether a conversion was feasible, but whether the cost of the conversion was valid, especially in view of the potential shortfall in exhibition space. There appeared to be no Business Plan in place to manage the potential 10% drop in community use of the building.

Councillor Cunningham was also concerned with the indication in the report that there may need to be an element of cross-subsidy from the Museums Service into the running costs of the facility. He also had difficulty with the cost estimates presented in the report, in that the capital estimate of £3.5M included the Resource Centre, but the cost for the work to the Town Hall alone was shown in the Feasibility Study at an estimate of £3.44M.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Cunningham for his presentation.

64. REFERRAL FROM HITCHIN COMMITTEE – 22 SEPTEMBER 2009 – HITCHIN TOWN HALL – MUSEUM FEASIBILITY STUDY – UPDATE ON PROGRESS

The Vice-Chairman of the Hitchin Committee presented a referral from the meeting of that Committee held on 22 September 2009 in respect of the Hitchin Town Hall: Museum Feasibility Study (Minute 43 refers). The recommendations of the Hitchin Committee to Cabinet were as follows:

- (1) That Cabinet be advised that the Hitchin Committee did not support any Option proposed in the draft feasibility study which would end the use of Hitchin Town Hall as Hitchin's 'Central Community Centre' with the large main hall continuing to be available for public use;
- (2) That Cabinet be advised that Hitchin Committee was committed to support the continued presence of a Museum within Hitchin that would include the Hitchin Collection;
- (3) That the Hitchin Committee requested that serious consideration should be given to other options for Hitchin Museum and a Museum for North Hertfordshire including those presented this meeting (Development of Library and Museum at Paynes Park);
- (4) That the Hitchin Committee supported the work of Hitchin Initiative and other local organisations pertaining to alternative options for use of Hitchin Town Hall."

RESOLVED: That consideration of this referral take place in conjunction with agenda item number 7 (see Item Minute 68 below).

65. REFERRAL FROM LETCHWORTH COMMITTEE – 23 SEPTEMBER 2009 – HITCHIN TOWN HALL – MUSEUM FEASIBILITY STUDY – UPDATE ON PROGRESS

The Chairman of the Letchworth Committee presented a referral from the meeting of that Committee held on 23 September 2009 in respect of the Hitchin Town Hall: Museum Feasibility Study (Minute 59 refers). The recommendations of the Letchworth Committee to Cabinet were as follows:

- “(1) That the process of locating the District Museum in Hitchin Town Hall, with the subsequent loss of this valuable community facility, be stopped with immediate effect;
- (2) That the proposed closure of Letchworth Museum and Hitchin Museum be postponed until arrangements are finalised for an alternative District Museum;
- (3) That Cabinet consider proposals for alternative locations for a District Museum, including Letchworth Town Hall. This is a redundant building that NHDC already owns, which is suitable for conversion to a District Museum, is capable of future expansion and will provide a sustainable base for the Museum Service in North Hertfordshire.”

RESOLVED: That consideration of this referral take place in conjunction with agenda item number 7 (see Minute 68 below).

66. REFERRAL FROM LETCHWORTH COMMITTEE – 23 SEPTEMBER 2009 – LETCHWORTH MULTI-STOREY CAR PARK – IMPROVEMENT AND REFURBISHMENT OPTIONS

RESOLVED: That consideration of this referral take place in conjunction with agenda item number 12 (see Minute 73 below).

67. REFERRAL FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 13 OCTOBER 2009 – HITCHIN TOWN HALL – MUSEUM FEASIBILITY STUDY – UPDATE ON PROGRESS

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee presented a referral from the meeting of that Committee held on 13 October 2009 in respect of the Hitchin Town Hall: Museum Feasibility Study (Minute 53 refers). The recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee to Cabinet were as follows:

- “(1) That Cabinet revisit all aspects of the options for improving museum provision in the District, whilst delivering required savings;
- (2) That Cabinet should examine ways to retain sustainable community use of Hitchin Town Hall, irrespective of any decision regarding museums;
- (3) That Cabinet reconsider their decision to close Letchworth Museum, until such time that a new museum provision is available;
- (4) That recommendations 9.2 and 9.3 of the report entitled Hitchin Town Hall - Museum Feasibility Study - Outcome be deleted.”

RESOLVED: That consideration of this referral take place in conjunction with agenda item number 7 (see Minute 68 below).

68. HITCHIN TOWN HALL – MUSEUM FEASIBILITY STUDY – UPDATE ON PROGRESS

Prior to the consideration of this item, Councillors Bernard Lovewell, Ian Knighton and Claire Strong declared personal interests in respect of the matter, in view of their role as trustees of the Hitchin Town Hall Workman's Hall and Gymnasium Trust. They remained present in the Chamber for the duration of this item.

With the aid of Powerpoint slides, Mr Neal Charlton (on behalf of Buttress Fuller Alsop Williams, the Council's consultant Architects) gave a presentation on the various aspects of the proposed scheme, both in terms of the new Museum element and the improved community facilities. One of the features that Mr Charlton drew attention to was the shared entrance, which enabled the new facilities to be in use at the same time or independently of each other.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement and Rural Affairs presented a report of the Strategic Director of Customer Services in respect of the Feasibility Study for the conversion of Hitchin Town Hall to a Museum. The following annexes were submitted with the report:

Annexe 1 – Hitchin Town Hall Museum Feasibility Study – October 2009;

Annexe 2 – Further Technical Information.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement and Rural Affairs began by addressing each of the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee as follows:

- (1) This process had been carried out by the Museums Fundamental Service Review in 2005, and any savings had been already identified or made;
- (2) Previous proposals to retain a completely sustainable community use of Hitchin Town Hall, such as the Council / Hitchin Initiative bid for Lottery Funding in 2007, had failed;
- (3) This recommendation was addressed in Recommendation 9.3 of the report;
- (4) The proposal to delete Recommendations 9.2 and 9.3 of the report could not be supported.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement and Rural Affairs reminded Cabinet of the background and history of the Museums situation, and drew attention to the consultation that had been carried out on the matter through the Arts & Heritage Forum, Facilities Working Group, Area Committees and the Scrutiny Committee.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement and Rural Affairs outlined a number of reasons as to why she considered the proposal to be viable, which included:

- The new Museum would provide a facility fit for the 21st Century;
- The Museum would be larger than the two existing Hitchin and Letchworth Garden City museums combined;
- A coffee shop would be provided;
- School parties could be accommodated (up to 4 or 5 groups at a time);
- There would be more storage space available than the two existing Hitchin and Letchworth Garden City museums combined;
- The Museums Service staff could all be accommodated in one place.

In debating the report, Cabinet Members made a number of additional comments in support of the report, which included:

- The Lucas Room would be refurbished and retained for community use;
- There would be improved changing facilities;
- The refurbished gymnasium would be able to accommodate approximately 400 standing and 200 seated;
- Approximately 90% of existing community users could be accommodated in the new facility, with the majority of users of the main hall being able to use the refurbished gymnasium;
- The Council was willing to invest over £3.5million to provide both a new Museum and improved community facilities at the Town Hall;

A concern was expressed regarding the 10% or so of existing users that would be unable to use the proposed new facility. It was confirmed that officers would be working towards either assisting in finding alternative venues for such users or requesting them to consider scaling down their activities in order that they could be accommodated in the refurbished Town Hall. It was noted, however, that the

Feasibility Study was not a detailed design proposal, and that consultation with existing or potential new users would need to take place as more detailed designs and management arrangements were developed.

The Chairman thanked everyone who had contributed to the debate upon this item, and thanked officers for a comprehensive report and the consultant for an excellent feasibility study.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the findings set out in the report and Feasibility Study for conversion of Hitchin Town Hall into a new Museum be supported;
- (2) That the comments, views and recommendations of the public speakers, the Hitchin Committee, the Letchworth Committee and the Scrutiny Committee be noted.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:

- (1) That the necessary financial and other resources necessary to progress the conversion of Hitchin Town Hall into a new Museum be put in place;
- (2) That, subject to this, the financial impact of delaying the closure of Letchworth Museum to coincide with the plans to open the new museum be quantified.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure Members receive and understand the professional advice about the suitability of Hitchin Town Hall to be a new museum, whilst also being able to continue to provide community use facilities in Hitchin town centre; to ensure that consideration is given to the broader consequences of the decisions relating to this project; and in order that the project can be managed efficiently, in line with agreed project management methodologies to ensure wide community involvement in the detailed plans for this new public facility, and provide good value for money from the Council's investment.

69. INTERIM GREEN SPACE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE

The Portfolio Holder for Leisure and E-Government presented a report of the Head of Leisure and Environmental Services seeking approval to the completed Green Space Management Strategy for the District. The following appendix was submitted with the report:

Appendix 1 – Comments from Area Committees on the Interim Green Space Management Strategy.

The Portfolio Holder for Leisure and E-Government informed Members that the views of the Area Committees on the Strategy had been noted, and that the financial implications for implementation of the Strategy remained unchanged from the report on the Interim Strategy previously considered by Cabinet.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the comments from Area Committees, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be noted;
- (2) That the completed Green Space Management Strategy be adopted;
- (3) That the Action Plans associated with the Green Space Management Strategy be approved;
- (4) That any alterations required to link the Strategy with the Green Space Infrastructure Study be approved by the relevant Portfolio Holder(s).

REASON FOR DECISION: To provide a robust value for money approach for the future provision and maintenance of the Green Space provision within the District that meets the community's needs.

70. REGIONAL AND STRATEGIC PLANNING ISSUES

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport invited the Regional & Strategic Sites Manager to present a report of the Strategic Director of Planning, Housing and Enterprise informing Members of the current position regarding the Review of the East of England Plan. The following appendix was submitted with the report:

Appendix 1 – East of England Plan Review – Recommended Consultation Response.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport drew attention to a number of minor amendments to the Council's proposed response to the East of England Regional Assembly's (EERA) consultation on the East of England Plan Review, which were supported by Cabinet.

RESOLVED: That a response to the EERA consultation on the East of England Plan Review be submitted based on the information contained in Appendix 1 to the report, incorporating the minor amendments outlined by the Portfolio Holder for Planning & Transport, and subject to any further amendment necessary following the meeting of the Hertfordshire Infrastructure and Planning Panel on 17 November 2009.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure that the Council's views are considered on the EERA consultation.

71. CORPORATE BUSINESS PLANNING 2010/11 - EFFICIENCY AND INVESTMENT PROPOSALS

The Portfolio Holder for Finance presented the report of the Strategic Director of Financial and Regulatory Services in respect of Corporate Business Planning 2010/11 – Efficiency and Investment Proposals. The report updated Cabinet on the budget pressures and required efficiencies target for the Council to keep within the financial parameters set out in its Financial Management Strategy 2010-2015, and presented to Cabinet the list of efficiency and investment proposals submitted by officers for 2010/11 and onwards. The following appendices were submitted with the report:

Appendix A1 - Medium Term General Fund 5 Year Forecast (based on 0.50% Council Tax increase);

Appendix A2 - Medium Term General Fund 5 Year Forecast (based on 1.50% Council Tax increase);

Appendix A3 - Medium Term General Fund 5 Year Forecast (based on 2.50% Council Tax increase);

Appendix B – Efficiencies – First round expenditure proposals;

Appendix C – Efficiencies – First round income increase proposals;

Appendix D – Efficiencies – Second round expenditure proposals;

Appendix E – Efficiencies – Second round income increase proposals;

Appendix F - Investments – Revenue proposals;

Appendix G – Investments – Capital proposals.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance brought to Cabinet's attention a number of the major issues contained in the report, following which the Chairman invited Members to consider each of the efficiency and investment proposals outlined in the appendices to the report.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Item R1 – Proposed 10% Increase in Burial Charges – be retained in the lists of Efficiencies and Investment Proposals for 2010/11 only, and be reviewed again on an annual basis;

- (2) That the following items be retained in the lists of Efficiencies and Investment Proposals for 2010/11, but that further discussion and investigation be undertaken on these items:
- E13 – Withdraw funding for the Anchor Handyperson Scheme;
 - E14 – 50+ Operational Budget – cessation of certain activities managed and delivered by the Council and partner agencies;
 - E21 – Grant aid to organisations to not be inflated from 2009/10 values;
- (3) That the views of all Members at the Member workshops and the views of Scrutiny, Area Committees, Local Strategic Partnership and Business Ratepayers on the lists of Efficiencies and Investment Proposals for 2010/11, as now amended, be sought from November to December 2009.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure that all relevant committees and groups are consulted on the proposed efficiency and investment proposals and afforded the opportunity to comment before Cabinet sets the draft budget in December 2009; and to ensure that the Council is able to adjust its base expenditure downwards to narrow the gap between its 2010/11 District Requirement figure, as adjusted for anticipated capping limits, and its service spending requirements.

72. THE HERTFORDSHIRE RECESSION PLEDGE AND FEDERATION OF SMALL BUSINESS ACCORD

The Strategic Director of Planning Housing and Enterprise presented a report of the Head of Policy, Partnerships and Community Development in respect of the Hertfordshire Recession Pledge and Federation of Small Business (FSB) Accord. The following appendices were submitted with the report:

Appendix A – FSB Small Business Engagement Accord Principles;
Appendix B – Hertfordshire Recession Pledge;
Appendix C – Response to the Small Business Accord.

The Strategic Director of Planning Housing and Enterprise drew attention to the fact that the Recession Pledge contained a 10 day payment commitment. As NHDC currently paid 98.61% of its invoices within 28 days, it had been acknowledged by the County Council and FSB that, should the Pledge be agreed by the Council, it would not be signing up to the 10 day payment commitment.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Hertfordshire Recession Pledge, with the exception of the move to a 10 day payment commitment, be endorsed;
- (2) That it be noted that the Council has a sustained and effective payment scheme for its suppliers through which 98.61% of invoices are paid within 28 days, as recognised positively by its business support colleagues;
- (3) That the principles described in the Small Business Engagement Accord be supported.

REASON FOR DECISION: To respond to latest initiatives to address the economic downturn in Hertfordshire.

73. NHDC PARKING STRATEGY – DRAFT ACTION PLAN

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport presented a report of the Strategic Director of Planning, Housing and Enterprise seeking approval of a High Level Action Plan for the NHDC Parking Strategy. The following appendix was submitted with the report:

Appendix 1 - NHDC Parking Strategy – High Level Action Plan.

The Chairman of the Letchworth Committee presented a referral from the meeting of that Committee held on 23 September 2009, regarding the Letchworth Multi-Storey Car Park – Improvement and Refurbishment Options (Minute 57 refers). The Letchworth Committee had recommended the following to Cabinet:

- “(1) That the Letchworth Multi-Storey Car Park becomes the prototype for the proposed “Pay on Foot” system of charging;
- (2) That, as Town Centres is one of the NHDC key priorities, serious and urgent consideration be given to the identification of funding to improve the condition of Letchworth Multi-Storey car park, in particular the lifts that service the car park, in advance of the installation of a new system of charging;
- (3) That Officers be requested to approach Vale Retail to contribute towards the costs of refurbishment of Letchworth Multi-Storey Car Park as the shops which primarily benefit from the Letchworth Multi-Storey Car Park are owned by that organisation.”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport thanked the Letchworth Committee for its comments and recommendations, and undertook to ensure that these were borne in mind by officers in moving forward the Strategy. The Transport Policy Officer confirmed that the Letchworth Multi-Storey Car Park, together with the Lairage and St. Mary's Square Car Parks in Hitchin, were the three prime candidates for the prototype “Pay on Foot” system of charging. The Portfolio Holder for Finance commented that, whilst there were proposed Capital Investment Proposals relating to car parks in the current list of Investments for 2010/11, there was no guarantee that the funding would become available to progress these schemes.

In response to a question regarding the timing of some of the works outlined in the Action Plan, the Transport Policy Officer confirmed that it ought to be possible to re-schedule these should it be appropriate and expedient to do so.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the comments and recommendations of the Letchworth Committee in respect of the Letchworth Multi-Storey Car Park be noted, and officers be requested to bear in mind these views in moving forward the NHDC Parking Strategy;
- (2) That the Parking Strategy High Level Action Plan be endorsed for the purposes of assisting the Corporate Business Planning process for 2010/11 and beyond and to set out the delivery programme of the Parking Strategy in the short to medium term;
- (3) That a preference for the Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ) reviews programme, as set out in Item DW3 of Appendix 1 to the report, be confirmed.

REASON FOR DECISION: To support the new NHDC Parking Strategy and Corporate Business Planning process.

74. CCTV SCRUTINY TASK & FINISH GROUP – FINAL REPORT

The Chairman of the CCTV Scrutiny Task and Finish Group (Councillor Sal Jarvis) presented the final report of that Task and Finish Group. The following appendices were submitted with the report:

Appendix A – Final report of CCTV Scrutiny Task and Finish Group;
Appendix B – CMT's comments on Task and Finish Group's Recommendations.

The CCTV Scrutiny Task and Finish Group's recommendations, which had been supported by the Scrutiny Committee at its meeting held on 13 October 2009, were as follows:

- (1) The Council's CCTV Strategy should set out its aims for the use of CCTV, along with measurable objectives and the means for achieving them;
- (2) There should be proper scrutiny of NHDC's involvement in the CCTV Partnership, and the Portfolio Holder should produce and present an annual report to a suitable scrutiny committee;
- (3) That the Community Safety Team analyse and explain the key themes and changes for CCTV every six months;
- (4) The Partnership should undertake a regular review of camera locations, and take account of the latest evidence when deciding on the use and placement of cameras;
- (5) The Partnership should make this information available for review by the Area Committees so that the Responsible Authorities Group can make decisions based on sound evidence:
- (6) That CCTV reports for individual wards and cameras in the Members Information Service bulletin should be accessible by a link rather than set out in the bulletin itself;
- (7) Cabinet should review the case for using covert cameras for envirocrime to ensure it is getting value for money;
- (8) In order to facilitate this review, the Council should:
 - (i) Develop a local indicator to allow monitoring of the levels of fly tipping in rural areas and provide information on trends;
 - (ii) Lobby through the LGA for detailed guidelines on fly tipping as well as stronger penalties for environmental crimes.
- (9) The Council should include an item on CCTV on the agenda of the annual Town and Parish Council Conference;
- (10) All CCTV publicity and reports should be displayed on the Council website – even if this only links to the Partnership's website;
- (11) There should be a regular article in Outlook bringing out the achievements of the Partnership.

It was noted that CMT had supported the majority of the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group. However, the Scrutiny Committee had disagreed with the view of CMT in respect of recommendation (5) that locality panels were a good forum for Members to consider the use and location of CCTV cameras. The Scrutiny Committee had noted that panels' boundaries sometimes excluded areas of CCTV coverage, including town centres; their proceedings were not always recorded; and their priority was to listen to the concerns of residents. The Scrutiny Committee considered that it would be better if detailed consideration of local CCTV could be made by the relevant area committee.

Cabinet considered each of the Task and Finish Group's recommendations, together with the CMT comments upon each of them.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Recommendations (1), (2), (3), (6), (10) and (11) of the CCTV Scrutiny Task and Finish Group be accepted;
- (2) That, in respect of Recommendation (4) of the CCTV Scrutiny Task and Finish Group, it be agreed that it will always be open for Area Committees to make suggestions as to the use and placement of CCTV cameras;

- (3) That, in respect of Recommendation (5) of the CCTV Scrutiny Task and Finish Group, it be agreed to support the Scrutiny Committee's recommendation that it would be more appropriate for Area Committees (as opposed to the Locality Panels) to review the use and placement of CCTV cameras and make recommendations to the Responsible Authorities Group;
- (4) That Recommendations (7) and (8) of the CCTV Scrutiny Task and Finish Group be accepted, subject to the consideration of the narrative set out in Paragraph 4.6 of the covering report;
- (5) That Recommendation (9) of the CCTV Scrutiny Task and Finish Group be accepted, with the caveat that the final decision on the inclusion of an item on CCTV within the annual Town and Parish Conference agenda will be subject to discussion with Town and Parish Councils, not necessarily imposed upon them.

REASON FOR DECISION: To respond to the recommendations of the CCTV Scrutiny Task and Finish Group.

75. PREPARATIONS FOR FLU PANDEMIC (INFLUENZA A-H1N1)

The Strategic Director of Customer Services made an oral presentation to Cabinet in respect of preparations regarding Flu Pandemic A-H1N1.

The Strategic Director of Customer Services informed Cabinet that:

- The second wave of the pandemic had probably begun, with the number of cases approximately doubling each week;
- There had been over 100 deaths in the UK associated with the pandemic;
- The vaccines had arrived in Hertfordshire, and would be distributed on a priority basis;
- In the week to 15 October 2009, over 1,000 unique reference numbers had been issued in Hertfordshire, and 700 courses of anti-viral drugs had been prescribed;
- The NHDC Business Continuity Team was continuing to meet bi-weekly to ensure vital services would be maintained;
- Further staff briefings and press articles had been prepared;
- North Hertfordshire had been identified as one of the major areas where a local authority was likely to be required to establish an anti-viral drug collection point, and NHDC was still in a state of preparedness should the need arise.

RESOLVED: That the oral report of the Strategic Director of Customer Services regarding preparations for Flu Pandemic (Influenza A-H1N1) be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To keep Cabinet updated of progress in respect of preparations for Flu Pandemic (Influenza A-H1N1).

76. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended).

77. OFFICE ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY UPDATE

Prior to the consideration of this item, Councillor T.W. Hone declared a personal and prejudicial interest in respect of the matter, in view of his role as Deputy Executive Member for Resources at Hertfordshire County Councillor. He left the Chamber for the duration of this item.

The Head of Finance, Performance & Asset Management presented a Part II report in respect of an update on the Office Accommodation Strategy. The following appendices were submitted with the report:

Appendix A – DCO Refurbishment and Extension Option;
Appendix B – Options for continued use of the DCO, including extension;
Appendix C – Options: Summary of costs.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee presented a referral from the meeting of the Scrutiny Sub-Group which had been set up by that Committee to consider the Office Accommodation Strategy update. The Sub-Group had recommended to Cabinet that, should it decide to not proceed with the purchase of the Letchworth Grammar School site, it should pursue Option 2 in Appendix B to the report (minor improvements and essential repairs to the District Council Offices, improvements to the showers and toilet facilities, and internal alterations to enable hot desking).

Cabinet agreed that, in the current economic climate, it would not wish to pursue the purchase of the Letchworth Grammar School site, nor would it wish to undertake major extension and/or improvement works to the District Council Offices. However, in supporting, in principle, Option 2 in Appendix B to the report, Members requested that a more detailed breakdown of the costs associated with this option be submitted to the next meeting of Cabinet.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That no further action be taken on the proposal to purchase the former Letchworth Grammar School site;
- (2) That Option 2 in Appendix B to the report (minor improvements and essential repairs to the District Council Offices, improvements to the showers and toilet facilities, and internal alterations to enable hot desking), and as recommended by the Scrutiny Committee, be supported in principle;
- (3) That a report providing a more detailed breakdown of the costs associated with Option 2 in Appendix B to the report be submitted to the next meeting of Cabinet.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure best value and to meet the aims and objectives of the Council's Office Accommodation Strategy.

The meeting closed at 12.03am.

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Chairman