

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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

**Meeting held at The Community Centre, Simpson Drive, Baldock
on 25 September 2006 at 7.30 p.m.**

PRESENT: *Councillors M.E. Weeks (Chairman), A.D. Young (Vice-Chairman), S.K. Jarvis, Marilyn Kirkland, I.J. Knighton and M.R.M. Muir.*

IN ATTENDANCE: *Barrie Jones (Head of Financial Services), Louise Symes (Projects Manager, Planning Services), Richard Tiffin (Area Planning Officer), Stuart Izzard (Senior Community Development Officer (Youth)) and Donna Levett (Committee & Member Services Officer).*

ALSO PRESENT: *12 members of the public.*

CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed all present to the meeting and informed them that the running order would be slightly amended, with the planning items being considered immediately after Public Participation.

42. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

Councillor S.K. Jarvis arrived at the meeting at 7.38 p.m.

43. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 August 2006 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and signed by the Chairman.

44. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was submitted for consideration by the Committee.

45. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor M.R.M. Muir declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 9 – Committee Development & Area Visioning Budgets 2006/2007: Grant Application – The Rotary Club of Baldock - as he was a member of the Rotary Club. Councillor Muir reserved his right to speak and vote on this matter.

46. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No items were presented for consideration by the Committee under general public participation.

Mr Edward Humbert had given due notice that he wished to speak at the meeting regarding planning application reference 06/01241/1 – Ashwell Tennis Club, Land at Small Gains Lane, Off Station Road, Ashwell. Mr Humbert, as Chairman of the Tennis Club, was the applicant, and spoke in favour of the application. He outlined the membership of the Club and its proposed uses for the facility, and stressed the care and expertise that had been invested into ensuring the impact of the lighting on neighbours and the surrounding countryside was minimised. He also informed the Committee that the Club would not envisage significant usage of the floodlights, and that they would be happy to accept a condition of the planning permission restricting their hours of usage.

The Chairman thanked Mr Humbert for his presentation and informed him that the points he had made would be considered by the Committee when determining the application.

47. DISPOSAL OF LAND AT POCKET PARK, DARK LANE, SANDON

The Head of Financial Services presented a report to the Committee which sought their views on the proposal to dispose at discount an area of land adjacent to 27 Dark Lane, Sandon to North Hertfordshire Homes Ltd (NHH).

As the Ward Councillor for the area, Councillor S.K. Jarvis acknowledged the need for affordable housing provision in Sandon, but informed the Committee that the land was currently well used by younger children from that part of the village for play. In light of this, Councillor Jarvis stated that he would be reluctant to see the land disposed of as proposed, without being absolutely sure there were no suitable alternative sites in and around the village.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Head of Financial Services stated that NHH had investigated alternative sites in the village, but that none had been suitable for this development. He also drew to the Committee's attention the fact that only half of the current site would be developed for affordable housing, with the rest remaining as a pocket park, maintained by NHH.

RESOLVED: That the report of the Head of Financial Services be noted.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

- (1) That North Hertfordshire Homes Ltd (NHH) be asked to undertake a further review of potential development sites in and around the village of Sandon for the provision of affordable housing, to determine the necessity of the loss of this important community facility;
- (2) That the outcome of the review be brought to a further meeting of the Baldock & District Committee for discussion and comment prior to determination of the proposal for disposal by Cabinet.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) The site was capable of development for the provision of 6 affordable houses by the RSL with the Authority benefiting from nomination rights to meet local needs.
- (2) It was difficult to predict whether RSL's could compete with private developers or be able to fund development on the site that was capable of being sold at open market value without similar local authority support to that planned.
- (3) The project provided sustainable development by the improvement and retention of a pocket park and the provision of 6 eco-standard residential units.
- (4) Section 25 of the 1988 Local Government Act consented the disposal of land to registered social landlords at less than market value for the development of housing. The discount proposed for the site was within current authority practice.

48. BALDOCK TOWN HALL FEASIBILITY STUDY

The Head of Financial Services and the Projects Manager (Planning Services) presented a report which sought the Committee's views on the findings from the Consultant's Feasibility Study on the Baldock Town Hall, and their agreement on the next steps in the process. The consultant's report was attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

The Committee supported the work undertaken to date by the consultants in relation to a building which was a vital part of the town vista and an important community facility. However, they also recognised the need for realistic, sustainable future uses

of the building, and the part that could potentially be played in that future by commercial organisations as well as community groups. In light of this, the Committee stressed the need for the second phase of the project – that of determining the actual proposed business case in detail – to be carried out in a fully professional and complete manner, and asked that all those involved be given the time and assistance required to achieve this goal.

The Committee also stated that the Baldock Museum was an important part of the town's heritage and, whilst its current location was not suitable for purpose, it would be necessary to relocate the Museum to premises somewhere within the town centre, should facilities not be available within the Town Hall. It was also noted that the suggestion to relocate the Museum to the Community Centre would not be feasible in the current situation as there was no available floorspace at the Centre.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Head of Financial Services confirmed that the next steps in the project, as set out in Section 5 of his report, would not result in additional costs as they should be absorbed from within existing revenue budgets.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report of the Head of Financial Services and the findings of the Baldock Town Hall Feasibility Study, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be noted;
- (2) That the next steps in the project, as set out in Section 5 of the report of the Head of Financial Services be agreed.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To enable officers to proceed with the second stage of the project to assess and recommend to Members as independent a view as possible of the most cost efficient and sustainable option for the Town Hall that would meet the needs of the local community and contribute to the viability and vitality of the town centre. This next stage would seek to meet the aims of the adopted Baldock Town Centre Strategy and, in doing so, would contribute towards achieving the Council's strategic objectives.

49. CHAMPION NEWS

The Senior Community Development Officer (Youth) presented a report of the Head of Community Development & Cultural Services to the Committee, which advised them of the activities undertaken by the Senior Community Development Officer (Youth) since the meeting of the Committee held on 14 August 2006, and brought to their attention some important community based activities that would be taking place during the next few months.

With regard to the Baldock Town Centre Enhancement Scheme, the Committee raised concerns about the postal questionnaires that had been sent out. Concerned residents had been contacting their Councillors after receiving those questionnaires, but Councillors had not received copies and so were not aware of the content. Questions had also been raised about the provision for responses as no provision had been made for varying opinion within households.

The Senior Community Development Officer (Youth) informed the Committee that there were still some unresolved issues with regard to the arrival of the Baldock Chartered Street Fair 2006, but stressed that the Fair would still be held as planned on the Chartered dates, regardless of the outcome of ongoing negotiations of the Highways Authority. The Committee expressed their thanks to the Senior Community Development Officer (Youth) for the hard work that had been invested in the arrangements surrounding this event, and their support for the successful resolution of negotiations.

With regard to the issue of the necessity of the overnight closure of the Bypass Tunnel, as raised by the Committee at the meeting held on 14 August 2006 (Minute

35 refers), the Senior Community Development Officer (Youth) informed the Committee that the Project Manager for the Baldock Bypass was preparing a written response and this would be circulated to Councillors as soon as possible.

Finally, the Senior Community Development Officer (Youth) drew the Committee's attention to paragraph 4.3.4 – Clothall Common – Community Projects & Initiatives Evening. He informed the Committee that this event had been rescheduled to Tuesday 10 October 2006.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report of the Head of Community Development & Cultural Services be noted;
- (2) That the actions taken by the Senior Community Development Officer (Youth) to promote greater community capacity and well-being for communities in the Baldock & District area be endorsed.

REASON FOR DECISION: To keep members of the Committee apprised of the latest developments in community activities in the Baldock & District area.

50. ANNUAL GRANTS AND DEVELOPMENT DISCRETIONARY BUDGET 2004/05

The Senior Community Development Officer (Youth) presented a report of the Head of Community Development & Cultural Services to the Committee, which set out the budgetary situation for the Committee, together with 2 additional grant applications that had been received.

The Committee expressed their dissatisfaction at the requirement for applications for funding from only one Ward's budget to be brought before Committee for approval, as it was felt to be unnecessary. Whilst the Committee acknowledged the requirement for the Committee's agreement to such grants under the terms of the Council's Financial Regulations, and the practice of the Council's other Area Committees to have a central discretionary budget rather than split the budget by Ward, it was felt that the threshold at which applications must be reported to Committees was set too low at £250.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the current expenditure and balance of the Development Budget be noted;
- (2) That the Head of Community Development & Cultural Services be requested to review the threshold of £250 at which grant applications had to be reported to Committee, with a view to increasing it.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

- (1) The report was intended to apprise Members of the financial resources available to this Committee. It drew attention to the current budgetary situation, assisted in the effective financial management of the Committee's budget and ensured actions were performed within the Authority's Financial Regulations and the guidance contained in the Grants procedure;
- (2) The awarding of financial assistance to voluntary organisations and the use of discretionary spending allows the Committee to further the aims and strategic priorities of the Council.

51. GRANT APPLICATION – ROTARY CLUB OF BALDOCK

The Committee considered an application from the Rotary Club of Baldock for funding toward the cost of purchasing new Christmas Street Lighting Panels. This was an ongoing project within Baldock Town Centre, and one to which the Committee had made a contribution in previous years.

The Committee were supportive of the Rotary Club's continued commitment to the provision of Christmas lighting in Baldock. However, it was noted that the lighting panels being installed sat flat to the buildings on which they were placed, which reduced the impact from the road, and it was therefore requested that these panels should not be the only form of new lighting to be purchased and installed.

RESOLVED: That the sum of £1,250 be awarded to the Rotary Club of Baldock as a financial contribution toward the purchase of additional Christmas Lights for the town, such funds to be allocated as follows:

£250 from the Baldock East Ward Discretionary Budget; and
£1,000 from the Baldock Town Ward Discretionary Budget.

REASON FOR DECISION: The awarding of financial assistance to voluntary organisations and the use of discretionary spending allows the Committee to further the aims and strategic priorities of the Council.

52. GRANT APPLICATION – CLOTHALL VILLAGE HALL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

RESOLVED: That the sum of £1,000 be awarded to the Clothall Village Hall Management Committee as a financial contribution toward the cost of the project to renew Clothall Village Hall, such funds to be allocated from the Weston & Sandon Ward Discretionary Budget.

REASON FOR DECISION: The awarding of financial assistance to voluntary organisations and the use of discretionary spending allows the Committee to further the aims and strategic priorities of the Council.

53. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The Committee heard an oral representation in relation to the planning application from the applicant, Mr Edward Humbert. Details of this representation can be found at Minute 46 above.

RESOLVED: To determine the application as set out in the report of the Head of Planning and Building Control as submitted to the Committee in the following schedule:

SCHEDULE

Reference Number	Description of Development and location	Decision
06/01241/1	Ashwell Tennis Club, Land at Small Gains Lane, Off Station Road, Ashwell Erection of 4 lighting columns and floodlights for Ashwell Tennis Club on land off Small Gains Lane (variation of planning permission 05/01138/1).	REFUSED (as per report)

54. PLANNING ENFORCEMENT – UNAUTHORISED ADVERTISEMENT AT NEWNHAM ROAD / CALDECOTE ROAD, NEWNHAM

The Area Planning Officer presented a report of the Head of Planning and Building Control to the Committee, which sought their authorisation to take enforcement action to secure the removal of an unauthorised advertisement displayed on land adjoining Newnham Road and Caldecote Road, Newnham.

The Area Planning Officer informed the Committee that, subsequent to the publication of the agenda, the advertisement had been removed, but that the Committee's authorisation was still sought so that action could be taken should the advertisement return at a later date.

In light of the decision taken by Council at its meeting held on 21 September 2006 that enforcement action would no longer need to be authorised by Area Committees, the Area Planning Officer confirmed that this would be the last such report that would come before the Committee. However, the Committee stressed the importance of ensuring that Members were kept informed of actions authorised and taken, and requested that an update be provided to Committee when such situations occurred, in a similar manner to the current reports received on Planning Appeals.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That, subject to the Head of Legal & Democratic Services being satisfied with the evidence, the Planning Control & Conservation Manager be authorised to take enforcement action to secure the removal of the unauthorised advertisement displayed on land adjoining Newnham Road and Caldecote Road, Newnham;
- (2) That an oral update of any enforcement action taken within the Baldock & District area be provided to future meetings of the Committee, in association with those of Planning Appeals.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To protect the visual amenity of the Green Belt and highway safety.

55. PLANNING APPEALS

The Area Planning Officer informed the Committee that the following planning appeals had been lodged since the meeting of the Committee held on 14 August 2006:

Appellant	QUBE Planning Ltd
Reference number	06/00842/1LB and 06/00850/1HH
Address	Westbury Farm House Ashwell
Proposal	Single storey rear extension
Method	Written representations

The Area Planning Officer informed the Committee that the following appeals had been determined since the meeting of the Committee held on 14 August 2006:

Appellant	Mr Tony Coates
Reference number	05/01860/1
Address	Land rear of 1a Hadrian Way, Baldock
Proposal	Detached bungalow
Decision	Appeal DISMISSED

The meeting closed at 9.53 p.m.

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Chairman