

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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

**Meeting held in the Hartsfield JMI School, Clothall Road, Baldock
on 12 January 2009 at 7.30 p.m.**

MINUTES

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

IN ATTENDANCE: *Ashley Hawkins (Consultation Officer)
Louise Symes (Project Manager, Planning)
Terry Nickolls (Principal Engineer)
Claire Morgan (Community Development Officer)
Susanne Gow (Committee and Member Services Officer).*

ALSO PRESENT: *Clare Heyhoe – Baldock Town Hall Arts Group
Rob Scahill – Baldock Town Hall Stakeholder Group*

Approx. 40 members of the public.

57. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for attending.

He reminded Members that any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda, should be declared as either a prejudicial or personal interest, and they were required to notify the Chairman of the nature of any interest declared at the commencement of the relevant item on the agenda. Members declaring a prejudicial interest were to leave the room and not seek to influence the decision during that particular item.

The Chairman also announced that nobody had registered to speak and pointed out that the Committee would be debating the contentious issues of proposed traffic regulation orders for car parking in Baldock Town Centre and also on-street waiting restrictions and objections to both these issues. He proposed and the Committee agreed for members of the public to address the Committee at Agenda Item 10 for two minutes each. He asked for volunteers to address the Committee: one resident of Whitehorse Street and one business owner in Whitehorse Street; and one resident of High Street, Baldock and one business owner in the High Street. Four speakers volunteered and were agreed as representatives by the other members of the public.

58. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

59. MINUTES – 17 NOVEMBER 2008

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meetings held on 17 November 2008 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

60. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

There was no notification of any other business to this Committee Meeting.

61. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Please refer to Minute 66 below.

62. KEY FINDINGS FROM THE NHDC 2008 DISTRICT-WIDE SURVEY, WITH PARTICULAR FOCUS ON RESPONSES FROM BALDOCK RESIDENTS

The NHDC Consultation Officer (CO) took the Committee through the report and its Appendix, pointing out that this exercise to assess the attitudes of residents towards North Herts District Council (NHDC) and the services it provided, was carried out in North Hertfordshire every two years – the last one had been in 2006.

The CO assured the Committee that the results from Baldock residents mirrored the general figures from the whole of North Herts, with increasing/improving facilities for teenagers being of highest importance to residents both in Baldock and across North Herts, along with improvements to recycling facilities, more road/footpath repairs and improvements to public transport being vital to those living in Baldock.

The Baldock and District Committee discussed and commented on the report, and asked questions of the Consultation Officer, who on occasion referred to the Head of Strategy and Support Services for clarification.

It was stated that the survey showed satisfaction with the markets, children's play areas, indoor pools and on-street parking had decreased compared with 2006, with on-street parking being a particular bone of contention.

The Chairman asked whether the questions asked gave reasons for responses, e.g. why residents were dissatisfied with local parks and play areas, facilities for teenagers, markets and on-street parking etc, and was informed that reasons were given, but were subject to confidentiality. However, this information was available to Members and the CO agreed to pass it to the Chairman and Baldock Members as soon as possible.

The Chairman thanked the Consultation Officer and the Head of Strategy and Support Services for the comprehensive answers given to the Committee's questions.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Baldock and District Committee note the report and identify the areas for action or investigation by NHDC officers in developing the proposed action plan arising from the 2008 District-Wide Survey, to be considered at the next PARC Meeting on 29 January 2009;
- 2) That the Chairman of the Baldock and District Committee requested sight of the reasons for dissatisfaction with local parks, play areas, facilities for young people, markets and on-street parking, all of which were subject to confidentiality.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- 1) To demonstrate the willingness of the North Herts District Council to act to address any concerns highlighted by its residents in order to maintain future resident involvement in the consultation process;
- 2) To avoid public scepticism and disengagement;
- 3) To actively respond to the "Satisfied Communities" Strategic Objective by producing relevant actions.

63. PUBLICATION OF REPORTS ON THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF BALDOCK

The North Herts District Archaeology Officer (AO) gave a Powerpoint presentation regarding the publication of reports on the archaeology of Baldock.

He explained that English Heritage had proposed funding five volumes on the archaeology of Baldock, but due to long delays nothing had happened for several years. However, at the end of 2007, Cambridge academics stated that they would like to see what could be published. He gave some background to the publications, declaring that in Baldock the largest number of burial sites had been uncovered outside Egypt, and that the site of the current Baldock Football Club was on top of a Roman temple, which would be excavated as soon as the Football Club moves. The AO stated that Baldock could become a place of international importance due to Roman and Iron Age remains which were being regularly uncovered.

The AO's proposal was to fund publication of three volumes instead of the original five, through the North Herts District Council's Museums Service and the North Herts Archaeological Society, enabling a properly printed and academically-reviewed first

volume to be available in the summer of 2009. Work on the second volume could then start in the autumn of 2009, with publication aimed for late 2010 or early 2011.

These two organisations had previously worked together on the successful ***Ancient Baldock*** book, and all profits were to be ploughed back into this academic text. Profits from Volume 1 would be used to fund the other two volumes proposed. The proposal is that copies of Volume 1 would be sent to academic journals for review, and there will be an official launch in Baldock.

The AO proposed that using his DTP and editing skills, a draft would be produced and sent to the academic reviewers during the week commencing 19 January 2009. This copy would be reviewed by a number of people, and as a result, this volume could be published in late June or early July. He estimated that 200 copies of this volume could be published for less than £1,000.

For the future, the Archaeology Officer claimed that the draft texts from the previous volumes 2 to 4 would become the new Volumes 2 and 3. More work is required on these, and although academic, all the volumes would be much easier for the layman to read and understand.

The Chairman thanked the Archaeology Officer for his presentation, and praised his calibre and hard work, stating that North Herts District Council was lucky that he was their employee. He stated that the Baldock and District Committee offered him their support, and would follow with interest the progress of publication of the reports on Archaeology in Baldock.

The Members then discussed the presentation that had just been given, and commented that the importance and degree of importance of the archaeological finds being made in Baldock could put Baldock on the map internationally and raise its profile at academic and non-academic levels. When questioned, the AO agreed, stating that he currently had two PhD students per year coming to Baldock to study and assist with archaeological digs, but he foresaw that this could rise to at least 10 per year once the first volume had been published.

The Members questioned the AO on different types of archaeological finds, and the Chairman thanked him once again for his informative and fascinating presentation.

64. BALDOCK TOWN HALL ARTS GROUP

Mr Rob Scahill provided an update on the progress made with the activities planned and the use by the community of Baldock Town Hall. He used a Powerpoint presentation to put across his points, and told the Committee that at the start of the refurbishment process, Baldock Town Hall had suffered from water ingress, safety problems and inadequate fire protection amongst other diverse problems. As a result, a group of people formed a Baldock Town Hall Stakeholder Group, which included the Baldock Town Hall Arts Group formed by Joanna Cherry and Clare Heyhoe.

North Herts District Council had spent £70,000 on getting the building refurbished and into a useable state, and the Baldock Town Hall Arts Group then planned and ran a very successful three-week Baldock Arts Festival. Taking the revenue made from the Arts Festival and the amount spent on hiring seats, scenery and other essentials to the tune of £21,000, together with income of £17,500 this brought the accounts to £3,500 under break-even point.

The current status is that Joanna Cherry holds the licence for the building, the utility bills are paid by North Herts District Council although the Hall is not currently open for general use.

Mr Scahill stated that what was needed was a Board, a management team and operational staff. The options as they saw it were:

- To operate under licence for North Herts District Council (NHDC)
- To operate on a short term lease
- To operate on a long term lease
- Transfer of community assets
- To buy the building.

He claimed that NHDC do not currently provide financial support, but do provide building maintenance, as it costs approximately £30,000 per annum to run the building.

To run the building under licence for one year (2009), it would be necessary to:

- Convene a Board
- Implement an agreed operating framework
- Secure capital funding for staged improvements (a lift, a bar, toilets, an extra stairwell and improvements to the basements)
- Secure funds for fixtures and fittings (seating, lighting, sound)
- Ask for help with running and utility costs.

It was planned to secure Board representatives from:

- Baldock Town Hall Arts Group
- Baldock Festival organisers
- District Councillors
- Baldock Museum
- Baldock town Centre Partnership
- Baldock Society
- Baldock Community Centre.

Mr Scahill saw the next steps as getting the Board together to agree a "Vision"; putting together a management team; creating an events calendar and starting to plan and run activities and performances in Baldock Town Hall.

Clare Heyhoe thanked the Committee and the general public present for all the support they had shown.

The Chairman then thanked Rob Scahill and Clare Heyhoe for their hard work and stated that he hoped that Baldock as a town would support the bringing back into use of Baldock Town Hall, as it had the potential to be a great facility for the community. He further congratulated Mr Scahill on his excellent presentation.

The Committee then discussed the presentation and the points it had raised. The main point concerned support for the Baldock Town Hall Stakeholder Group, as this was thought to be the only way that the whole project would work. It was agreed that help and support should be forthcoming from the villages surrounding Baldock as well as from the Town itself, and many village residents were found to have attended the events held during the Baldock Festival in October 2008. It was suggested that the Town Hall could be used for such events as meetings, sports clubs, a CAMRA beer festival amongst others. It was agreed that some events suggested were more specialised than others, and therefore brought in more people from the area, but it was proposed that efforts should be made to attract people from the surrounding towns (Stevenage, Letchworth, Hitchin) and even farther afield by means of posters, the Press and an up-to-date website.

Mr Scahill was questioned as to whether a Business Plan had been put together and he confirmed that it had, and that he was working with Peter Underwood, the NHDC Community Facilities Manager. The Chairman asked Mr Scahill whether NHDC officers had proposed a 1-year lease on Baldock Town Hall, but Mr Scahill informed him that a 3-year lease had been suggested. Now that it was known what events would run well, one year was short enough to ensure that everybody "got their act together", and could be extended if successful.

The Members stated that there was an enormous task ahead, but that by taking it in small steps the Stakeholder Group were on course for success. The Baldock and District Committee wished Mr Scahill, the Baldock Town Hall Stakeholder Group and the Baldock Town Hall Arts Group the very best of luck in their endeavours.

65. BALDOCK TOWN CENTRE ENHANCEMENT UPDATE: INFORMATION NOTE

The Projects Manager, Planning Services stated that there was very little to add to the information set out in the Information Note.

The Baldock and District Committee then questioned the Projects Manager, Planning Services (PMPS) and the Principal Engineer (PE), who clarified various points raised by Members:

- Due to low lighting levels, both the contractor, Skanska McNicholas, and EDF were working together to install the new lighting columns before the old ones were removed. It was confirmed that the lighting levels could be adjusted;
- Of the concern raised that grassed areas could be at risk from off-street parking and should therefore be surrounded by kerbstones for protection, the Principal Engineer declared that he will find out if this can be done, and the cost involved;
- Putting in flower borders may help to prevent off-street parking, but none were planned at present. The PE stated that this could affect the Baldock Fair, and informed Members that 15,000 flowering bulbs for Spring and early Summer flowering plants would be planted as part of the Enhancement Scheme, for flowering in 2010;
- The question, as to whether the operators of the Baldock Fair had been informed that any damage done to pavements and grassed areas would have to be made good, was asked, and the Committee were assured that all stallholders were well aware of this and understood it, although it could not be legally enforced. However, the Health and Safety Inspectorate could carry out an examination of the area at any time;
- The Committee stated that there should be enforcement to stop vehicles damaging the grass, and this would then prevent it happening. However, it was agreed that some of the damage would occur in the evening when customers for the restaurants parked on the High Street, so physical prevention was also required. The PE confirmed that enforcement officers were able to work during evenings and weekends, and that double yellow lines enforcement would occur at irregular intervals to prevent residents and customers becoming used to the patterns of enforcement. This would result in the penalising of people parking in the entrances behind the yellow lines;
- The Committee was informed that to complete the Baldock Town Centre Enhancement on time (in April 2009), the works on the roundabout at the top of the High Street was necessary and must be completed by mid-February. The PMPS advised that there would be some disruption at the Whitehorse Street/Station Road traffic lights and that this would not occur until the work at the High Street/Whitehorse Street roundabout had been completed.

66. BALDOCK TOWN CENTRE ENHANCEMENT SCHEME - PROPOSED TRAFFIC REGULATION ORDERS FOR CAR PARKING IN BALDOCK TOWN CENTRE AND ON-STREET WAITING RESTRICTIONS: CONSIDERATION OF OBJECTIONS

Owing to the contentious nature of this item, the Chairman had stated that, using his discretion, he would allow the following volunteers to address the Committee: one resident of Whitehorse Street and one business owner in Whitehorse Street; and one resident of High Street, Baldock and one business owner in the High Street.

They spoke as follows for 2 minutes each:

Mr Trevor Connor, a resident of Whitehorse Street addressed the Committee. He stated that he had received a letter informing him that he would receive a resident's parking permit and did not think that it would be a problem. He considered that the new restrictions would free up the parking situation, and he suggested that a review should be held after a 6 month period to monitor the situation.

Mr John West, who owns a hardware business in Whitehorse Street stated that he was not unsympathetic to the residents of Whitehorse Street who needed to park their vehicles, but that customers liked to park as close as possible to the businesses in Whitehorse Street. His suggestion was that the long car parking space outside Putterills Estate Agents could be designated for residents, to enable both residents and customers to share the parking.

Mr John Howard, landlord of The Cock public house in High Street, Baldock, addressed the Baldock and District Committee. He said that he was concerned that an accident would happen on the slip road on the High Street. He was interested in finding out about how the loading and unloading would work when bollards were erected in the High Street. He believed that the parking had contributed to the downturn in business in Baldock.

Mr Mark Donofrio, a resident of High Street, Baldock, declared that he believed that an important point to take into account was that local businesses and residents did not want any change to parking in Baldock. For example, on the slip road running parallel to the High Street, residents with families could lose their parking, which would cause a serious safety issue for parents with young children loading and unloading their cars. In addition, businesses loading and unloading quickly in the area would have to leave their cars unlocked. Mr Donofrio stated that he had bought his house with its parking allocation and he wanted it left as it is. He declared that the new parking schemes were ensuring that the dwellings lost some of their value.

The Chairman thanked all four speakers for their eloquent presentations, and stated that the matter would be the subject of Committee discussion.

The Principal Engineer (PE) and the Projects Manager, Planning Services (PMPS) informed the Baldock and District Committee that the two Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) which had been published in November 2008, had been advertised in response to comments and concerns raised by local residents and businesses during the consultation on the Masterplan for the Enhancement Scheme. A number of meetings were also held with residents and businesses in late 2007 where a proposed parking strategy for Baldock Town Centre was presented to and agreed by the Baldock and District Committee at their meeting in November 2007. Letters were sent in early November 2008 to those residents and businesses most likely to be affected by the proposed TROs. Notices were also published in the local Press, placed on sign posts and also on the North Herts District website.

The key issues raised in response to the proposed TROs were given as:

- Loss of long stay parking for businesses;
- Businesses on Whitehorse Street and High Street believe that residents would use up all the long stay parking.

They stated that there would be two parts to the TROs:

- Restrictions to waiting – yellow lines including bus stops and taxi ranks etc;
- Control of parking – permits and parking restrictions (bulk of concerns raised were from businesses with the issuing of permits).

There were minor objections raised to the Restrictions of Waiting TRO on the number of spaces suggested (three), for the taxi ranks. The PMPS advised that the number of taxi spaces had not changed since prior to the Enhancement Scheme, as consultation had been carried out with local taxi firms.

It was proposed to put double yellow lines in the slip road, as these could be removed later on.

An estimated 30 parking permits were to be issued, based on the survey carried out in High Street and Whitehorse Street.

Options for consideration were:

- Not to proceed with the TROs;
- Alter any part to suit, in the light of the comments made by the speakers who had addressed the Committee - to make them more onerous by adding in double yellow lines, or less onerous by removing yellow lines;
- If they were altered to suit objections, the TRO would have to be republished. This would be supported by the Legal Departments of North Herts District Council and Hertfordshire Highways.

The officers recommended staying with the status quo for both TROs, i.e. as advertised, as no precise answer could be given on the potential take-up of permits, as this was based on surveys previously carried out by consultants in High Street and Whitehorse Street, with a view that an estimated 30 permits may be taken up.

Discussion took place on the Restriction of Waiting TRO and the Chairman suggested the Restriction of Waiting Order except for double yellow lines in the slip road, with a review being carried out in 6 months' time.

The PE informed the Committee that an Order in Part could be made, in which part of the TRO could be removed and replaced later if desired. This process was limited to 24 months from the date of the Order, and the part removed would have to be reviewed within that period, so it would satisfactorily cover a review after 6 months.

It was proposed that:

- 1) the TRO for on-street waiting restrictions go ahead as it stands, and the bollards be removed, with the scheme being reviewed after 6 months;
- 2) to alter the control of parking, requiring re-advertising, as there would be changes to the character of the Order, making it more onerous. One parking permit would be allocated for each resident;
- 3) the residents' permits be removed and re-advertised;
- 4) the residents' permits be modified and re-advertised.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Restriction of Waiting Traffic Regulation Order should proceed in part, excluding the double yellow lines in the slip road off High Street, Baldock;
- 2) That there should be two parallel Control of Parking Traffic Regulation Orders, one as advertised at present, and a revised Traffic Regulation Order with no residents' parking permits, both covering the same core area;
- 3) That the revised Traffic Regulation Order states that:
 - i) there should be no residential parking;
 - ii) the signs for parking restrictions on High Street, Whitehorse Street, Sun Street and east Hitchin Street state "Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm" and be for No Return in 2 hours in Whitehorse Street and Sun Street, and No Return in 2 hours in High Street and Hitchin Street;
 - iii) the signs for parking restrictions should be included for Saturday mornings throughout Baldock, and state "from 9am to 1pm".

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

To ensure that the proposed Traffic Regulation Orders for the Baldock Town Centre Enhancement Scheme are implemented within the set and agreed project programme for the completion of the works, as well as ensuring that the expectations of the Baldock and District Committee and general public are met.

67. CHAMPION NEWS

The Community Development Officer (CDO) for Baldock and District introduced a report of activities that had taken place since the last meeting on 17 November 2008.

She had given updates in her report on the progress towards:

- a new Baldock Guide Hut, which would be a timber log cabin construction;
- the Baldock and District Youth Council has four members who, with the help of the CDO and Youth Connexions, organised an Under-18s music event in December 2008 which was extremely well supported. The Chairman suggested that the Youth Council was invited to attend a Baldock and District Committee Meeting, to tell the Councillors about their activities and to sit in on a Committee Meeting;
- the 'Give Way' markings painted on Mons Avenue and Willian Way;
- the Village of the Year Competition. The Members commented that Parish Councils needed more information than had been given, so that they could debate whether to enter the competition. They stated that the villages in the Baldock area seemed unenthusiastic about entering. The CDO was asked to furnish further information on the Competition to Members;
- further fund raising for Clothall Village Hall.

The CDO stated that an addition to her Champions News was that the North Herts Book Festival would be held in March 2009, and there would be several activities held in Baldock, including a Roman event in the Baldock Community Centre.

The CDO suggested that the subject of the Ivel Spring allotments should be brought up at the next Baldock and District Committee Meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Committee endorsed the actions taken by the Community Development Officer to promote greater community capacity and wellbeing.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To allow the Committee to enforce the actions and policies involved in the tasks and projects undertaken by the Community Development Officer.

68. BALDOCK AND DISTRICT COMMITTEE DEVELOPMENT AND AREA VISIONING BUDGETS 2008/2009

The Community Development Officer (CDO) took the Baldock and District Committee through the spreadsheet of Committee Delegated Budgets 2008/09 at Appendix 1 and noted the sums outstanding in the Pre-allocated Funds brought forward from the Civic Year 2007/2008.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Baldock and District Committee note the budgetary expenditure, current balances and carry forwards from the Ward Development Budgets 2007/2008, the Small Area Grants Budget and the allocated Visioning Budgets;
- 2) That the Baldock and District Committee consider the future commitment of any unallocated funds within the Ward Development Budgets prior to the end of the current financial year;
- 3) That the Baldock and District Committee consider the possible reallocation of funds from any initiatives/projects that are approaching two years on from the original date of commitment, and/or where there is likely to be no foreseeable progress in the near future.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To improve the services provided by the local organisations and groups that are available and accessed by various members of the community through the allocation of funds.

The meeting closed at 10.45p.m.

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Chairman

