

**Liberal Democrat Budget Workshop
7 November 2013**

General Comments

- with regards to the increase in collection of PCN income (B17) it was noted that this is revenue recovery and what is due to the Council.
- It was suggested that E5 to E7 were an attack on the communities and community policies and not helpful.
- the priority "living within our means" would appear to be a catch all for any capital project that does not fit under another priority.
- there was concern that the commentary for capital schemes suggests the Council will run the sports facilities
- it was noted there was a lot of requested investment in car parks.
- some of the capital schemes could be put back a year or two to make sure the programme is deliverable.

Ref No	Description of Proposal	Comments from Liberal Democrat Members
E1	Winter closedown of Broadway Fountain	There was a difference of opinion on whether this was a reasonable or not.
E2	Cease the production of bin hangers to advertise service changes for Christmas and other holidays	Support this proposal since the bin hangers often end up as litter on the streets. However, the website could be improved in order to find the dates for waste collection. It was suggested that other organisations in the Parish and Town Councils are willing to publicise this information.
E3	Proposed incorporation of Hertfordshire CCTV partnership	There was support for this proposal.
E4	Undertaking a backlog enhancement capital programme for buildings to reduce pressure on maintenance budgets	There was scepticism that the saving would really be realised as a direct consequence of the capital investment. This should be subject to more challenging questions to ascertain if it really makes sense to incur upfront costs or would it make more financial sense to increase the useful lives of assets by spending minor annual repair. More detailed work is required.
E5	Reduction in Grant paid over to the Parish, Town and Community Councils for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme	There were mixed views on this proposal because it was not clear what the impact would be on individual and individual residents in the Districts.
E6	Reduction in Area Committee discretionary grants by the same percentage as the reduction in the Council's Start Up Funding Assessment (currently estimated at 12% for 2014/15)	This proposal was not supported by some Members. It was suggested that it is illogical to only reduce budgets in proportion to the reduction in Government Funding and not all service budgets. A discussion should be had as to whether the Area Committees are at the right level and what grants are used for but that is a separate discussion to this proposal. The grants process is an important part of local democracy. The recommendations from the Task and Finish Group should be considered to determine if this proposal is appropriate.
E7	No further carry forward of unspent Area committee discretionary grant budgets	There was support for a more rigorous approach to the approval of carry forwards but do think it is important to have the ability to carry forward some budgets. Without this ability there is danger that grants will be run out or spent towards the end of the financial year. Budgets that are carried forward should be allocated to specific projects or specific themes.
Income Generation		
I1	New crematorium in Wilbury Hills. Capital costs are not yet known until the business case has been developed and agreed but is circa £1m-£3m	

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I2	Increase in parking charges of 13.45% (lost years of inflation related increases)	Would like to see the terms of reference for the review of parking to include consideration of outsourcing. There were no significant objections to this proposal although it was noted that this level of increase would have caused a large amount of negative public reaction.
Revenue Investment		
R1	Local Plan Production, Examination and Delivery	There was some surprise and concern that additional budget was required to deliver the local plan and that the budget was not already available. There was also concern that after the delivery of the plan the budgets would be released again. A clearer description of the budgeted arrangements would be helpful.
R2	Production of Neighbourhood Plans	
R3	Explore options for the provision of an Economic Development Officer	There was concern about what the Officer would actually deliver and noted that economic growth does not always occur within District boundaries.
R4	Outdoor Sports Facility Study	There was some scepticism about what value the study would have for the residents of the District and whether it would actually result in real sports facilities. However, it was noted that the study was required to help identify £106 million from Developers in the future and the proposal was generally supported.
Capital Investment		
C16	Letchworth Multi Storey Safety Edge Protection Fencing - To install safety fencing to the top decks of the multi storey car parks.	It does not seem sensible to spend this capital investment on the multi-storey when it is also intended to spend money on a care plan at the same time. Should the care plan not be completed first? It was noted that this was considered as part of the Parking Review.