

# Community Halls Strategy for North Hertfordshire

May 2011



1. Forward
2. Purpose
3. Scope
4. Definitions
5. Location and Geography
6. Population
7. Current Community Facility Infrastructure
8. Rationale of Service Provision
9. Condition Assessment of Existing Facilities
10. Quality Standard of Existing Facilities
11. Future Provision
12. Community Facility New Builds and Expansion
13. Support to Community Facilities
14. Consultation
15. Policies / Action Plan
16. Appendices
17. Reference Documents

Cover Photograph: Therfield Fordham Memorial Hall

## 1. Foreword

This strategy is the first of its kind to be produced by North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC). Its aim is to assist in developing and maintaining sustainable facilities appropriate to the needs of the community they serve.

It is widely recognised that village halls, community centres and other halls that provide space and facilities for community services and activities can make an enormous difference to the well being of their communities. They are mainly operated by voluntary charitable trusts.

Village halls and community centres exist with the purpose of meeting the needs of users and beneficiaries within their community needs which are rapidly changing. Social and economic factors are altering the demographics of many villages and towns. People's interests and tastes change. The challenge for trustees of these facilities is to adapt to reflect such changes in the way they operate.

The aim of this strategy is to identify what North Hertfordshire District Council and the many people involved in the management and operation of halls/community centres can do to adapt their operations to changing circumstances so that the halls can continue to serve their communities in the future.

This Community Halls Strategy provides an overall strategic approach for North Hertfordshire District Council in its operation and support to community facilities within the district. It has been developed after a review of the extent and quality of community facility service provision currently being delivered by the Council and third sector voluntary organisations, and addresses the part that the Council can play in ensuring that those services are sustained and expanded upon over the coming years. The Strategy also assesses the need for community halls in relation to future housing growth within the district to 2031.

There are forty seven managed halls, community centres, and village halls located across the district, plus a multitude of other miscellaneous facilities providing a range of leisure and entertainment activities to residents of all ages and cultural backgrounds. Most halls cover their day to day costs through income generation, however few have sufficient reserves to fund building modernisation and development costs when the needs arise without support. This is an area where NHDC has traditionally been able to assist. However with the difficult financial situation it now faces, this financial support will no longer be possible or will be severely limited.

North Hertfordshire District Council is however committed to the promotion of community cohesion, healthy living, and the reduction of social exclusion. The District's community facilities play a significant part in achieving these aims.

The multifunctional nature of these facilities caters for the diverse needs of the different community and faith groups within the District and must be supported as far as is possible to ensure their sustainability for the current populations and generations to come. NHDC is therefore committed to helping hall operators across all sectors to prove the need for these facilities and improve the limited funding opportunities that remain.

***Councillor Tricia Cowley***

*Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement and Rural Affairs*

## **1.1 Background Nationally**

The Charity Commission for England and Wales has issued a report compiled using evidence from their records and examination of their case files. We have used details from these findings to set out the national context information below.

Nationally it is well documented that some village halls are struggling to survive because of falling demand for the services they provide. Ageing populations, lack of interest amongst younger people or among new residents in commuter villages, competition from nearby towns and cities that are now easier to reach – all of these factors have been identified as problems for some rural village halls and community centres.

Difficulties also often arise in funding maintenance of these properties. In some cases, services and facilities that many local people rely upon are threatened because income from use of the hall is not sufficient to fund anything more than the day to day running costs. In most cases operators struggle to fund the modernisation of the property to comply with changes in regulations such as disability access and health and safety.

Village hall operators in particular are faced with the need to adapt their services and their property. There is evidence of a move away from the traditional village hall concept to a community based ethos of organisations combining to provide a broader service; a kind of 'community hub'.

This research revealed a clearly identifiable link between the ability of village hall and community centre operators to attract users, their ability to attract trustees and other volunteers, and their ability to generate funding.

### **Successful village halls or community centres usually have:**

- A governing document that is workable and up-to-date, containing provision for everything that the trustees need to do
- A trustee body that is diverse, knows the extent of its role, responsibilities and powers and presents potential new trustees with a realistic picture of what's involved
- A building that meets legislative requirements and that can facilitate a range of activities
- An effective means of communication and consulting with the local community to ensure that its needs and interests are understood and that the community knows about the halls/centres activities and plans
- A funding regime that is sustainable and diverse enough to allow trustees sufficient flexibility to direct their activities in accordance with local needs and interests
- A strategic plan, however simple, that takes account of the impact of proposed changes on all aspects of the running of the facility.

## 1.2 North Hertfordshire Background

Traditionally it has been easier to identify need in urban areas where the population is larger and more diverse and therefore the problems associated with social and economic deprivation are more likely to be apparent. However the District struggles to attract grant funding, because of its relative affluence. Funding the up-keep of a hall can be a problem if income from its use doesn't cover running costs, or allow for a "sinking fund" to be developed to pay for repairs and development of the building. Whilst there is no doubt that some operators face a battle to get users involved in the activities of their halls or community centres, there is also scope for efficiencies in the way that some halls operators are responding to this challenge. Our local research in compiling this Strategy revealed a mixed picture, with some hall operators being extremely effective at identifying and meeting the changing needs of their community and others being narrow in their focus, resisting any changes.

## 1.3 North Hertfordshire District Council's Role in Supporting Village Hall and Community Centres.

The Council's role in respect of village hall and community centres is to encourage and enable them to continue to meet the needs of their local communities and users. We aim to ensure that any facilities we directly provide do not disadvantage other halls and prevent any unnecessary barriers to hall operators' ability to generate sufficient income to survive and to adapt and modernise.

We also seek to ensure that new community hall facilities are provided where they are required and that they are built to a standard that meets the needs of the community In line with best practice.

We believe that community facilities are best run by the local population that they serve as this creates a stronger sense of community for a neighbourhood.

## 1.4 North Hertfordshire District Council's Role in Directly Providing Community Facilities.

In addition to its role with village halls and community centres the Council also provides community facilities via its three managed halls located in Hitchin and Letchworth.

These are Hitchin Town Hall, Bancroft Hall and Brotherhood Hall, and all are operated directly by the Council. These halls are not however well utilised and are not cost effective to operate. A fourth building, Baldock Town Hall, is no longer being made available by the Council for use as a community facility and thus not considered in any of the analysis within this document. However it should be noted that the building is currently the subject of an expression of interest from a local community group seeking to take up the operation of the building, from the Council, with a view to restoring its use as a community facility.

## 1.5 North Hertfordshire District Councils Vision is:

*"Making North Hertfordshire a vibrant place to live work and prosper."*

The Council regularly reviews its priorities to ensure they remain relevant and for 2011/12 these are:

- a. Town Centres**
- b. Green Issues**
- c. Sustainable Development**

Through such activities as area visioning and a District Wide Survey undertaken in 2008, the Council recognises that the multi-functional nature of community halls means that

they are one of the few places in a town or village that the local community can easily and openly access in order to take part in a wide range of activities that may suit their differing and particular needs and aspirations. These facilities can be a hub for the community by providing social, recreational, entertainment activities, and meeting spaces for political functions, such as elections, committees and surgeries. This is particularly important in the rural areas where there are limited other facilities available.

## 2. Purpose

**2.1** The purpose of this document is to define North Hertfordshire District Council's role regarding the operation of existing community halls, provide a strategy for supporting those facilities in a sustainable way, and advise on the construction and operational management of new builds in accordance with anticipated housing and infrastructure developments up to 2031 in the current difficult financial climate.

In so doing the document investigates the management and operational needs and arrangements of community halls and how community needs and local facility provision might be better aligned. The document also sets out Council policies to be implemented in relation to community halls for the future.

**2.2** Several areas of information were gathered and assessed. These included:

- A review of the current fabric and physical infrastructure of community halls to assess the existing level and scope of service provision, compliance with legislation, operational sustainability, short and longer term maintenance and/or capital works requirements and the estimated costs of those requirements.
- Analysis of current population distributions in relation to community facilities and the impact of projected population growth to 2031 on these facilities
- Information on existing community halls in terms of their operation and hire characteristics
- Analysis of community centres incomes and expenditures for 2008/09
- Current design and service delivery methods of newly constructed community centres

**2.3** This document will make recommendations in relation to:

- ✓ The operation of the Council's managed halls
- ✓ Indirect financial support of community facilities
- ✓ Future leasing arrangements for existing community centres and new builds
- ✓ Future community facility requirements to accommodate housing growth in North Hertfordshire to 2031.
- ✓ A framework for ongoing support of existing community facilities
- ✓ Developer contributions towards existing and new build community facilities.
- ✓ The design and location of new community facilities
- ✓ A framework for ongoing support of existing community facilities

### 3. Scope

- 3.1 This document considers existing community meeting places, community centres, village halls, town halls, scout huts, church halls, and dual-use facilities etc in the district. It also identifies future requirements to ensure that the necessary infrastructure is in place to accommodate anticipated population growth in North Hertfordshire. to 2031. This includes consideration of the Council's engagement with the Local Strategic Partnership, the local community, the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, Parish Councils, other relevant stakeholders, and adjoining authorities.

### 4. Definitions

- 4.1 For the purposes of this document the following definitions apply:

**“Community”** means a social group of any size whose members reside in a specific locality, share government, and often have a common cultural and historic heritage.

**“Community Hall”** means a facility where members of the public may gather for group activities, social support, public information, entertainment, education and other social purposes. In North Hertfordshire these are sub divided as follows:-

- **Urban Halls** – Community Halls owned and operated directly by the Council for the provision of community services to the whole population of the District and those living outside the district.
- **Community Centres/ Halls** – Community Halls owned by the Council but leased to a voluntary organisation with a management committee of local people providing community facilities to the local and wider population.
- **Village Halls** – Community Halls owned by charitable trusts or Parish Councils which, through management committees of local volunteers, provide community facilities to the local and wider population.
- **Other Community Halls / Facilities** – Facilities e.g. Church Halls, Scout Halls, etc that are predominantly found in the District's urban areas and provide a wide or focussed range of community service provision to the local and wider population.

### 5. Location and Geography

- 5.1 North Hertfordshire is one of ten districts within the county of Hertfordshire, with the District Council's main offices located in Letchworth Garden City. The district covers 37,538 hectares or about 23% of the county of Hertfordshire. It has four towns: Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Baldock and Royston, the urban area of Great Ashby on the edge of Stevenage and 33 rural parishes covering the outlying village and rural communities. It should be noted that, for accuracy of population growth forecasting, the Great Ashby Community Centre is specifically considered as an urban community facility in this document.

### 6. Population

- 6.1 Figures published in the authority's Sustainable Community Strategy 2009-2021 indicated that the population of North Hertfordshire taken at the 2001 census was 116,908, but the mid November 2007 population estimate published by the ONS had an increased figure of 122,500, with the majority living in the four urban settlements of Letchworth, Royston,

Hitchin and Baldock, and an estimated 30,000 living in the rural areas. The Council has made projections of the future population of the district based on ONS forecasts and planned levels of housing growth in the district and estimates that the total population for the district in 2031 will be 139,873. Details relating to the revised population growth are shown in **Table 1** below.

**TABLE 1: Revised Population Growth**

Parish	Population 2001 (census)	Households 2001 (census)	Household Completions 2001-2010	Estimated Household Completions 2010-2011	Estimated Population 2011	Estimated population 2031
Ashwell	1660	734	63	3	1847	1910
Baldock	9866	4207	153	58	10206	13391
Barkway	656	299	23	1	745	843
Barley	659	252	27	0	644	661
Bygrave	271	96	3	0	229	229
Caldecote	20	8	0	0	18	18
Clothall	161	62	1	0	146	148
Codicote	2560	1350	62	4	3271	3391
Graveley	475	202	9	0	487	499
Great Ashby	1256	545	1617	11	5019	5842
Hexton	134	52	0	0	120	120
Hinxworth	316	119	8	0	293	296
Hitchin	29985	13250	1365	127	34055	37126
Holwell	392	159	2	0	372	372
Ickleford	1848	807	14	4	1905	1933
Kelshall	149	60	4	0	148	148
Kimpton	2113	827	37	0	1996	2206
King's Walden	957	393	6	0	922	929
Knebworth	5034	1890	58	0	4500	4978
Langley	164	70	2	3	172	176
Letchworth	32932	13705	528	48	32988	35673
Lilley	374	154	4	2	369	372
Newnham	89	43	0	0	99	99
Nuthampstead	139	55	1	0	129	129
Offley	1307	540	56	0	1377	1508
Pirton	1217	481	19	1	1156	1160
Preston	481	148	4	0	351	353
Radwell	106	36	0	0	83	97
Reed	290	126	9	1	313	409
Royston	14570	5853	871	70	15694	18140
Rushden	242	94	3	0	224	224
Sandon	493	202	5	0	478	497
St Ippolyts	2014	743	21	2	1769	1998
St Paul's Walden	1205	482	37	3	1206	1317
Therfield	539	201	11	0	490	494
Wallington	159	51	0	0	118	118
Weston	965	396	32	1	990	993
Wymondley	1110	455	9	0	1072	1074
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>116908</b>	<b>49147</b>	<b>5064</b>	<b>336</b>	<b>126004</b>	<b>139873</b>



## 7. Current Community Facility Infrastructure

Community Hall provision within the District is provided via a number of means. This is by Urban Halls, Community Centres/Halls, Village Halls, and a range of other miscellaneous facilities such as Church Halls, Schools, Scout Huts etc all of which provide a wide range of hire and use options for the residents of North Hertfordshire.

### 7.1 Urban Halls

There are three urban halls within the District which are directly managed and operated by the Council. Funding comes from within annual Council budgeting provision with hire rates determined annually, which have traditionally been set at 'community' levels, rather than at levels that reflect actual operating costs. These halls are shown in **Table 2**.

### 7.2 Community Centres/Halls

There are eleven Community Centres within North Hertfordshire. These are all owned by the Council and operated under leased terms by Community Associations formed from local residents on a voluntary basis. These halls are shown in **Table 2**.

**TABLE 2: Community Centres and Halls in North Hertfordshire**

Property				
Letchworth	Hitchin	Royston	Baldock	Great Ashby
Brotherhood Hall	Hitchin Town Hall	Royston Day Centre	Baldock Community Centre	Great Ashby Community Centre
Mrs Howard Memorial Hall	Bancroft Hall	Coombes Community Centre		
The Grange Community Centre	Walsworth Community Centre			
Jackmans Community Centre	St. Michaels Community Centre			
	St. Johns Community Centre			
	Westmill Community Centre			

**Note:** This excludes Royston Town Hall which is owned and operated by Royston Town Council, and for the purposes of this document is classified under 'Other Community Halls / Facilities'

### 7.3 Village Halls

There are thirty three village halls distributed around the rural areas of the District. These are independently owned and operated usually by Parish Councils or voluntary charitable organisations, local residents and others. These halls are shown in **Table 3**.

**TABLE 3: Village Halls in North Hertfordshire**

Property	Property
Ashwell Village Hall	Newnham Village Hall
Barkway Village Hall	Offley Village Hall
Barley Town House	Peters Green Village Hall
Breachwood Green Village Hall	Pirton Village Hall
Clothall Village Hall	Preston Village Hall
Cockernhoe Village Hall	Radwell Village Hall
Codicote Peace Memorial Hall	Reed Village Hall
Codicote Sports & Social Club	Rushden Village Hall
Graveley Village Hall	Sandon Village Hall
Hexton St Faiths Centre	St Ippolyts Parish Hall
Hinxworth & Edworth Village Hall	Therfield Fordham Memorial Hall
Holwell Village Hall	Wallington Village Hall
Ickleford Village Hall	Weston Village Hall
Kelshall Village Hall	Whitwell Village Hall
Kimpton Village Hall	Willian Village Hall
Knebworth Village Hall	Wymondley Village Hall
Lilley Cassel Memorial Hall	

**Note:** *Clothall Village Hall is currently under reconstruction.*

#### **7.4 Distribution of Urban Halls, Community Centres/Halls and Village Halls**

All of the facilities discussed in 7.1 to 7.3 are mapped to indicate their relative geographical relationship as shown in **Appendix 1**.

Each location is shown with two catchment areas that are considered later in this document. One is a catchment radius of 800 metres, and the other is a catchment radius of 1200 metres. The locations are shown in summary by urban / rural location in **Table 4** .below.

**TABLE 4: Urban Hall Locations**

Location	Urban Halls	Community Centres	Village Halls
Letchworth	1	3	
Hitchin	2	4	
Baldock		1	
Royston		2	
Great Ashby		1	
Rural Areas			33
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>33</b>

## 7.5 Other Community Halls / Facilities

These are predominately located in the urban areas of the District, comprising faith-based centres, scout huts, schools and other / facilities halls or those operated by other independent organisations or agencies. It is recognised that these facilities add a considerable amount to the overall community infrastructure within the District, without any dependency on the Council for direct financial or other support.

**7.6** The Council fully recognises the invaluable contribution these 'Other Facilities' provide to their respective communities. From an exercise conducted in 2009/10 to map the location and service delivery of all urban facilities, a further exercise has been undertaken as part of this strategy to attempt to quantify the current nature and extent of this provision. This is considered later in the document, in terms of the extent of community provision that these facilities provide, and the impact of that level of provision, in the establishment of a target standard m<sup>2</sup> of halls per person for the district.

## 8. Rationale of Service Provision.

### 8.1 Urban Halls

**8.1.1** These buildings are owned and directly operated by the Council, with these facilities available for hire by the general public for various club / group participation, and private and event hire. Operational funding is provided via the Council's annual centres and halls budgets with income generated from a range of hire rates set by the Council on an annual basis. These hire rates are set at a 'community level' as opposed to a competitive market level however, which has meant that at no time in the past has the operation of the Urban Halls ever returned a break-even or profit-making position.

**8.1.2** Given the current economic climate this cannot be sustained. Whilst benefiting the people who specifically hire and use these facilities, it can be seen as disadvantaging the wider tax paying population of the District. This is in line with NHDC adopted Medium Term Financial Strategy which supports a review of charges to cover the cost of service provision. A specific policy to address this situation in halls is therefore suggested.

**8.1.3** We can summarise this policy thus:

The urban halls operated by the Council should employ a differentiated range of hire charges that are more in line with the buildings' operating costs. This to eliminate / reduce the loss making scenario that has existed for many years, and has led to hirers being increasingly subsidised by the North Hertfordshire tax payers.

**8.1.4** The costs of operating the three halls, Hitchin Town Hall, Bancroft Hall, and Brotherhood Hall, in relation to income between 2007 and 2010 are shown in **Table 5** below.

**8.1.5** In terms of utilisation, whilst all three halls are popular with the local and wider community, the use of the facilities is relatively low. They are not close to achieving what could be seen as a reasonable utilisation level, which is considered as being in the range of 70% to 80%.

**TABLE 5: Operating Costs for Council Managed Halls 2007/08 to 2009/10**

Year	Property	Hire Hours	Average Utilisation	Operating Costs	Income
<b>2007/08</b>	Bancroft Hall	1350.0	23.5%	£19,683.00	£12,398.00
	Brotherhood Hall	1362.5	23.4%	£ 7,832.00	£14,520.00
	Hitchin Town Hall	4632.0	26.5%	£129,913.00	£40,344.00
	Baldock Town Hall	none	n/a	£14,064.00	none
<b>2008/09</b>	Bancroft Hall	1324.0	22.7%	£18,950.00	£11,925.00
	Brotherhood Hall	1452.5	25.0%	£13,726.00	£15,093.00
	Hitchin Town Hall	3666.4	21.0%	158,585.00	£38,906.00
	Baldock Town Hall	6.0	-----	£16,092.00	£127.00
<b>2009/10</b>	Bancroft Hall	1324.8	22.7%	£32,124.00	£12,763.00
	Brotherhood Hall	1428.0	24.6%	£10,464.00	£14,446.00
	Hitchin Town Hall	4014.0	23.0%	207,262.00	£47,488.00
	Baldock Town Hall	13.5	-----	£20,757.00	£371.00

**Notes:**

- Utilisation figures are based on all halls being available throughout the year on a seven day / week basis.
- Operating costs are shown after the deduction of income.
- Baldock Town Hall figures are included for financial completeness in this analysis. The facility is not considered elsewhere in the document as it is now no longer in use and is being considered for disposal by the council.
- Operating costs include such things as business rates, utilities, cleaning depreciation etc.

**8.1.6** All three NHDC halls are ageing and in need of a considerable extent of refurbishment works as can be seen from the results of the most recent condition surveys undertaken upon them as shown below:

- Hitchin Town Hall: £1m+ condition assessment made in November 2007
- Bancroft Hall: £200k condition assessment made in September 2009
- Brotherhood Hall: £86k condition assessment made in March 2010

**8.1.7** Clearly the condition of these halls is likely to contribute to the extent of under occupancy in that people are deterred from hiring these facilities when comparing the level of service delivery with other comparable venues in the district. However given the extent to which the hall hire rates are significantly less than those other comparable sized venues one would expect a higher level of utilisation than shown above.

**8.1.8** Given that the extent of NHDC hall usage has virtually remained unchanged over the last three years in respect of these halls it would appear that any improvement of income would depend largely on a considerable amount of investment being made which, given the current economic climate, is unlikely to be achieved within Council budgets.

**8.1.9** However in November 2010 Council agreed to the refurbishment of Hitchin Town Hall to facilitate the transfer of the operation of part of the building to a local community organisation under leased terms for continued uses as a community venue whilst the remainder of the building will be converted into Museum premises to be run by the Council. A major amount of refurbishment work, costing in excess of £4M, is planned. The majority of the required capital funding has been agreed in the Council's own Capital programme in order to secure reductions in the Museums annual revenue costs.

**8.1.10** It is currently anticipated that operation of the building will continue under the control of the Council until December 2011, when it will close for refurbishment, re-opening in its new configuration in June 2013. Notwithstanding this situation the Council must still focus on the need to achieve improved income from the final months of the building's operation for the taxpayer and as such a review of the building's hall hire charges to something nearer to 'market rates' has been implemented on 1<sup>ST</sup> April 2011.

**8.1.11** With no further capital funding for halls identified the Council must consider the continued need for, and operational viability of, the other two directly managed facilities; Bancroft Hall and Brotherhood Hall.

**8.1.12** The condition assessment of Bancroft Hall referred to above indicated that in its current condition the building had a maximum operating life of five years. Given the current economic climate, the increasing incidence of vandalism, it is likely that this hall will be closed by the Council when its operational life can no longer be sustained. Parallel plans for Bancroft Gardens refurbishment may also bring this decision to a head. It is not anticipated that this hall will be replaced as no deficit of community hall space has been identified, See **Table 15** later in this document.

**8.1.13** Brotherhood Hall is in similar relative operational condition to Bancroft Hall and it is likely to be affected by future plans for the redevelopment of Letchworth Town Centre, which may see its demolition. Its operational future to that point will greatly depend on the extent to which the Council can attribute the appropriate revenue funding to that date, or perhaps evolve an operating policy involving other agencies to meet identified needs.

**8.1.14** We can summarise this policy thus:

The Council will seek opportunities to 'partner' with external agencies, other service providers, or voluntary groups, such that overall levels and scope of service delivery of urban halls may be maintained or improved where necessary to meet accessed need.. Any such arrangement will need to be able to demonstrate benefit to and support from the local community, and be based on sound business planning and be at no cost to the Council.

## **8.2 Community Centres**

**8.2.1** The District has eleven urban community centres, when The Mrs Howard Memorial Hall is included. All are managed and operated under leased terms from the Council by local voluntary groups, the majority of which are established as companies limited by guarantee, with charitable status.

- 8.2.2** Many of the people running the facilities have been associated with the building for many years and in some cases from the time of construction. All halls are very popular with the local communities they serve and in several cases are over subscribed in terms of hire demand. The facilities are all located fairly centrally within the urban district that they serve, typically within housing developments that were constructed at the same time and all offer a wide range of hire opportunities for local residents, and cater for a true mixture of community use for all ages and cultures.
- 8.2.3** The operating 'model' in terms of their purpose within the community entirely fits the rationale of true community facilities operated by the voluntary (third sector) as has been identified in recent studies as being the preferred way to provide community service delivery to local people. The Council's view is entirely consistent with this approach.
- 8.2.4** Income is generated via 'community focused' hire rates and in some cases supplemented by gift aided income generated by a trading subsidiary, established usually for the provision of alcohol and associated services for those using the facility for such events as private functions e.g. wedding receptions, birthday parties etc.
- 8.2.5** The operation of these facilities is supported under current leases by the Council in respect of payment for 'wind and watertight repairs' and in some cases contributions towards other repairs.
- 8.2.6** Financial assistance is also provided by the Council in the form of discretionary rate relief to qualifying facilities. An initial assessment is undertaken by the Council to determine that it is appropriate to grant discretionary rate relief when an application is made, See **Appendix 2**. Each application for relief is assessed on its own merits. The applicant submits an application form which is assessed against a scoring matrix. Any discretionary rate relief which is awarded is reviewed automatically every three years. Each organisation in receipt of the relief is required to complete and return a new form with appropriate supporting documents, including the organisations latest set of published accounts. The continued award of the relief will be reassessed against this new information for applicability. Discretionary rate relief is never granted automatically.
- 8.2.7** We can summarise this policy thus:

Where a charitable organisation operating a community facility makes an application for discretionary rate relief the Council will assess the application based on the organisations financial position and 'other community' factors at the time of application to ensure that the support is justified. Should the application be granted the Council will keep the situation under review in accordance with the organisation's published annual accounts to ensure that relief continues to be appropriate.

Any changes in the assessment process for discretionary rate relief will need to be undertaken in conjunction with all organisations that are in receipt of the relief at that time.

- 8.2.8** The extent of costs to the Council in support of these facilities over the last three years, can be seen in **Table 6** below:

**TABLE 6: Council Support Costs to Community Centres 2007/08 to 2009/11**

Year	Property	Operating Costs
<u>2007/08</u>	Walsworth Community Centre	£ 5,774.00
	Westmill Community Centre	£10,661.00
	Mrs Howard Memorial Hall	£44,605.00
	Royston Day Centre	£3,761.00
	St.Johns Community Centre	£14,048.00
	St.Michaels Community Centre	£15,685.00
	Great Ashby Community Centre	£37,151.00
	Jackmans Community Centre	£17,602.00
	The Grange Community Centre	£19,013.00
	Coombes Community Centre	£15,914.00
	Baldock Community Centre	£20,006.00
	TOTAL FOR YEAR	£204,220.00
<u>2008/09</u>	Walsworth Community Centre	£7,145.00
	Westmill Community Centre	£11,755.00
	Mrs Howard Hall	£36,415.00
	Royston Day Centre	£2,305.00
	St.Johns Community Centre	£15,273.00
	St.Michaels Community Centre	£15,927.00
	Great Ashby Community Centre	£16,332.00
	Jackmans Community Centre	£14,930.00
	The Grange Community Centre	£15,944.00
	Coombes Community Centre	£16,885.00
	Baldock Community Centre	£18,157.00
	TOTAL FOR YEAR	£171,068.00
<u>2009/10</u>	Walsworth Community Centre	£17,766.00
	Westmill Community Centre	£13,156.00
	Mrs Howard Hall	£50,114.00
	Royston Day Centre	£3,188.00
	St.Johns Community Centre	£18,526.00
	St.Michaels Community Centre	£20,582.00
	Great Ashby Community Centre	£12,592.00
	Jackmans Community Centre	£24,058.00
	The Grange Community Centre	£15,523.00
	Coombes Community Centre	£22,506.00
	Baldock Community Centre	£23,134.00
	TOTAL FOR YEAR	£221,145.00

**Notes:**

- a) Figures for the Grange Community Centre include the youth wing
- b) Operating costs include such things as repairs, depreciation etc.

**8.2.9** Given that several of these buildings turn over large sums of money (several hundred thousand pounds in some cases) and some of the operating organisations hold significant reserves, the process by which the North Hertfordshire tax payer contributes towards these costs appears unfair and unsustainable given the pressure on Council funding, and the need to sustain those facilities that cannot generate such surpluses. However it must be questioned whether these circumstances should continue, or whether by

improvements in operation of the buildings, increases in income can be achieved, and cost savings be made that could enable the facilities to cover all operating costs such that the local tax payer would no longer be required to subsidise their operation. In making decisions in respect of ongoing financial support to these facilities it should also be recognised however that these buildings are in differing states of operational condition.

**8.2.10** Clearly this is a rationale that can only be achieved after a considerable amount of assessment of the respective buildings' operating policies and procedures as the manner of operation and service delivery will vary from facility to facility. Here it is suggested that the Council could play an important role in assisting the development of a co-ordinated and standardised approach to community centre management that would assist all management associations to achieve improved and more cost effective service delivery.

**8.2.11** Another consideration is make is the extent to which 'value for money' (to the tax payer) is achieved through the operation of these community facilities. The majority of the existing leases for these facilities were established over a period of 42 years and many are approaching the time for renewal, in fact some have already reached that position and are currently 'held over' by the Council, as shown in **Table 7** below.

**TABLE 7: Community Centre Leasing Status**

Property	Current Lease Term (Years)	From	Review Date
Baldock Community Centre	42	1982	2024
Coombes Community Centre	25	1987	2012
Great Ashby Community Centre	42	2007	2049
Jackmans Community Centre	42	1970	2012
Mrs Howard Memorial Hall	5	2007	2012
Royston Day Centre	42	1990	2032
St Johns Community Centre	42	1989	2031
St. Michaels Community Centre	25	1984	2009
The Grange Community Centre	42	1965	2007
Walsworth Community Centre	42	1977	2019
Westmill Community Centre	42	1975	2017

**8.2.12** The original leases, all protected by the terms of the Landlord and Tenant Act (1954), were set at 'peppercorn' levels which are in all cases minimal and have not always been collected by the Council.

**8.2.13** Currently the majority of the facilities are charged at the same peppercorn rent levels and include the provision for NHDC to provide 'wind and watertight' repairs irrespective of their income and balances. Given that some facilities operate more profitably than others this would seem to be an inequitable approach to rental terms.

**8.2.14** Under the Landlord and Tenant Act (1954), the lessee is entitled to a new lease when the existing one expires for up to a maximum of 15 years at a market rent. The landlord can only refuse to grant a new lease on the following grounds:-

- a) a new development proposal is in place (i.e. planning permission achieved and funding in place) and therefore the site is required for other purposes;
- b) the landlord wishes to occupy the property;
- c) the existing lessee has been a bad tenant.



Assuming none of a)-c) above applies when these facilities leases come up for renewal the Council should give serious consideration to reviewing the annual rental charge as afforded / permitted by the Act.

- 8.2.15** The Council might consider requiring community centres to justify why on lease renewal it should not be required to have a full repairing lease at the commencement of the new lease term.
- 8.2.16** Assessment of the last three years' published accounts could be undertaken, as could an assessment of the level of existing financial support / subsidies being given by the Council. Rent reviews of say five year periods could be applied such that the situation could be adjusted if required in line with the financial success or otherwise of the facility. Lease renewals should therefore be by negotiation based on what the facility can afford.
- 8.2.17** We can summarise this policy thus:

When community centre leases come up for renewal the Council will seek opportunities to agree a renewal on a repairs basis that is appropriate for the operation of the facility and provides value for money to the local taxpayer. The desire is to remove the burden of operating those buildings falling to the local taxpayer who may not use them.

- 8.2.18** It should be noted however that two community centres, Jackmans and Westmill, are the subject of possible regeneration projects outline plans for which include the development of a new community centre provision.
- 8.2.19** Where new facilities are constructed such as they are being leased for the first time an initial 'sinking fund' for repairs may be appropriate, until say the first five year break period, when the situation is assessed against the managing organisations' published accounts. Exclusion from the Landlord and Tenant Act (1954) should also be a consideration.
- 8.2.20** The initial setting of the leased terms for a new facility to be kept under review on an ongoing basis in future years, at predetermined 'break' periods by assessment of the facilities' most recent published accounts to establish the extent of unrestricted funds held.
- 8.2.21** As part of the generation of this document an exercise was undertaken to assess these facilities' financial position as determined from its last set of published accounts. The results of this investigation indicated that some community centres were in a much better financial position than others and as such may therefore be in a position to pay the full costs relating to their buildings compared to others who were less financially secure.

### **8.3 Village Halls**

- 8.3.1** There are 33 Village Halls in the district, as previously shown in **Table 3**.
- 8.3.2** The majority of these halls were built before 1940, they are typically owned by charitable organisations or Parish Councils, with their operation being managed by local volunteers. In many cases the village hall forms the focal point of the village, being the only community facility available to local residents to meet and socialise. This has become increasingly the case over recent years with the closure of many rural public houses, post offices and shops. Thus it can be argued that village halls are experiencing something of a renaissance.
- 8.3.3** An audit conducted on village halls in March of 2004 and followed up in January 2005 indicated quite clearly that these facilities were in need of support from the Council, both operationally and financially. Following a report to Cabinet in March 2005 a new capital grant fund, the Parish Amenity Capital Improvement Fund (PACIF), was established to

encourage reinvestment in the rural infrastructure's sustainability. The PACIF fund was originally established later in that year with an overall budget of £1m to be made available to rural facilities at the rate of £250k per year. At the end of the fourth year a total of 21 grants, totalling £930k, had been awarded towards various projects. Given a maximum level of 50% this guaranteed at least £2M investment in North Hertfordshire. The balance of funding was carried over to a fifth year, in which applications totalling £200k were received indicating a strong demand for such funding still existed. As a result a further £250k was made available by the Council for a further final sixth year of PACIF, this being for the year 2010 /11. The PACIF scheme has now closed having given grants towards a total of 30 capital projects.

**8.3.4** In addition to this rural grant scheme financial assistance has also been provided by the Council, to eligible facilities, in the form of discretionary rate relief. Operational support was also provided to these rural facilities by the Council. This took the form of the establishment of village hall networking events and the creation of a Village Hall Handbook. The networking events were established on a six monthly basis, and held at different village hall locations to provide those operating the facilities with various information from Council officers in relation to such areas as Health and Safety, Licensing, Insurance etc. The events, which were held over two years, also allowed for networking to take place between those operating the halls but were discontinued due to falling attendances.

**8.3.5** The Council's Village Hall Handbook was first published in September 2004. This was a hard copy document providing details of each hall, and the services available for hire by the community. A total of 3000 copies of this handbook were printed and distributed by the Council free of charge. Recognising that the information was becoming out of date the Council, contacted all facilities again in 2009, and following an update transferred the handbook to its web site. This document is now again freely available to all in electronic format and is revised on a six monthly basis following updates provided by the village halls themselves.

## **8.4 Other Community Halls / Facilities**

**8.4.1** A telephone survey, of 'Other Community Halls / Facilities' completed in 2009 and revisited for robustness for the purposes of this strategy, was undertaken to quantify the extent to which these facilities contribute to the overall delivery of community services within the District's urban areas.

**8.4.2** A total of 107 facilities were identified and were able to provide details of their facility and the extent of their service provision. Of those 55 were able to provide an indication of the capacity usage of their building.

This showed that on average these facilities were utilised to 55% capacity, thus able to provide further capacity for hire by the community to that of the Urban Halls and Community Centres.

**8.4.3** A summary of the locations identified and the assessment made from the survey is shown in **TABLE 8** below. It should be noted that this analysis is not exhaustive as there may be other facilities in the community not covered in the survey.

**8.4.4.** The analysis does however serve to demonstrate that the urban areas are served by an extensive range of facilities for hire other than that by the more 'recognised' facilities directly or indirectly managed by the Council. A few other facilities were identified in the rural areas but have not been addressed in this document. The physical space contribution made by the other urban facilities is difficult to quantify, given that for many of these facilities only part of the building is available to hire and only for a limited proportion of the time. Therefore, we have worked on the assumption in our quantitative calculations that there needs to be a 40% uplift on the District's own urban halls in order to recognise the additional facilities which exist. However where this use of estimation suggests significant under provision, more detailed work has been undertaken to quantify the level

of 'other community facilities' available to that community, as in the case of Royston, and provision calculations adjusted accordingly.

**TABLE 8: Other Community Centres / Halls Survey Summary**

Location	A1	A2	B	C	D	TOTAL
Letchworth	0	3	7	23	17	50
Hitchin	0	0	11	13	8	32
Baldock	0	0	0	5	3	8
Royston	1	0	1	11	4	17
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>Key</b>	A1	Comprehensive Range of Community Facilities for Hire				
	A2	Less facilities than A1				
	B	Less facilities than A1 and A2				
	C	Less facilities than B				
	D	Specialist / Focussed Hire				

**Note** As references:  
A1 is considered as equalling Hitchin Town Hall  
A2 as equalling Urban Community Centres

## 9. Condition Assessment of Existing Facilities

- 9.1** A condition survey was undertaken in the first three months of 2010 to assess the current condition of the primary facilities in the district i.e. urban halls, community centres and village halls. The survey of each building was undertaken by a qualified building surveyor. The surveys comprised analysis of building dimensions, accessibility, condition, usage considerations etc.
- 9.2** The survey provided a report on each building giving the surveyors' views on recommended repairs and legislative requirements for the building to meet an appropriate level of operational condition.
- 9.3** The report also included estimated costs for the undertaking of the recommended works, which were ranked in order of priority from 'immediate' to 'within the next five years'. Based on a scoring system, and irrespective of the perceived works required, the survey also produced a ranking of the surveyors view of overall quality of the buildings from 'Excellent' through to 'Poor'.
- 9.4** The financial extent of estimated costs to bring each facility up to 'current standards', which include meeting the latest disability access requirements for example, are summarised in **Table 9** (Centres and Halls) and **Table 10** (Village Halls) below.

The figures in respect of the Council's managed halls have been addressed previously in Section 8.1.

**TABLE 9: Centres and Halls Estimated Improvement Costs**

Property	£
Royston Day Centre	31,550.00
Coombes Community Centre	84,400.00
Jackmans Community Centre	68,250.00
Westmill Community Centre	161,000.00
Walsworth Community Centre	32,650.00
The Grange Community Centre	88,500.00
Great Ashby Community Centre	21,250.00
Baldock Community Centre	152,000.00
St Johns Community Centre	52,500.00
St Michaels Community Centre	50,750.00
Mrs Howard Memorial Hall	14,000.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>756,850.00</b>

**TABLE 10: Village Halls Estimated Improvement Costs**

Property	£
Rushden Village Hall	41,850.00
Sandon Village Hall	38,800.00
Therfield Fordham Memorial Hall	39,350.00
Weston Village Hall	28,700.00
Hinxworth & Edworth Village Hall	14,250.00
Radwell Village Hall	73,650.00
Kelshall Village Hall	64,250.00
Newnham Village Hall	71,500.00
Reed Village Hall	44,750.00
Offley Village Hall	56,000.00
Holwell Village Hall	40,800.00
St Ippolyts Parish Hall	34,250.00
Gravelly Village Hall	77,250.00
Barley Town House	75,500.00
Breachwood Green Village Hall	84,750.00
Peters Green Village Hall	95,250.00
Pirton Village Hall	30,750.00
Codicote Sports & Social Club	168,750.00
Ickleford Village Hall	37,750.00
Willian Village Hall	83,500.00
Knebworth Village Hall	35,400.00
Whitwell New Fellowship Hall	95,250.00
Preston Village Hall	17,350.00
Clothall Village Hall	See Note a)
Cockernhoe Village Hall	See Note b)
Kimpton Memorial Hall	39,650.00
Great Wymondley Village Hall	49,000.00
Codicote Peace Memorial Hall	76,000.00
Lilley Cassel Memorial Hall	23,250.00
Ashwell Village Hall	97,250.00
Barkway Village Hall	51,650.00
Wallington Village Hall	27,350.00
Hexton St. Faiths Centre	96,500.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,810,300.00</b>

**Notes:**

- a) Excluded from survey – currently under reconstruction
- b) Excluded from survey – under reconstruction at the time of the survey

Operational details of all of the facilities in **Tables 9 and 10** above sites can be found on the Council's website at:

[http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/index/community\\_and\\_living/community\\_centres\\_and\\_facilities.htm](http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/index/community_and_living/community_centres_and_facilities.htm)

**9.5 Table 11** below shows the detailed breakdown of these estimated costs over recommended periods of time as discussed above. An example of a site assessment record, for Willian Village Hall, is included as **Appendix 3**.

**TABLE 11: Breakdown of estimated improvement costs implementation**

Property	Estimated Value of Works Required By Urgency							Total Est. Cost of Works (£)
	Recommended Time period (yrs)	1	1/2	2	2/3	3	3/4	
Royston Day Centre	£5,186	£5,186	£9,535	£6,785	£2,286	£1,286	£1,286	£31,550
Coombes Community Centre	£11,400	£47,500	£300	£22,300	£1,800	£300	£800	£84,400
Rushden Village Hall	£5,000	£16,750	£15,600	£1,500	£3,000	£0	£0	£41,850
Sandon Village Hall	£2,250	£24,300	£6,250	£500	£5,000	£0	£500	£38,800
Therfield Fordham Memorial Hall	£0	£15,850	£3,000	£6,500	£2,833	£9,833	£1,334	£39,350
Weston Village Hall	£3,350	£16,350	£250	£8,750	£0	£0	£0	£28,700
Hinxworth & Edworth Village Hall	£7,500	£0	£0	£6,500	£0	£0	£250	£14,250
Radwell Village Hall	£0	£26,900	£0	£21,750	£0	£0	£25,000	£73,650
Kelshall Village Hall	£0	£18,750	£0	£20,750	£0	£0	£24,750	£64,250
Newnham Village Hall	£0	£12,500	£0	£39,750	£0	£0	£19,250	£71,500
Reed Village Hall	£0	£23,750	£0	£9,250	£0	£0	£11,750	£44,750
Walsworth Community Centre	£0	£10,500	£0	£11,400	£0	£0	£10,750	£32,650
Offley Village Hall	£0	£26,750	£0	£22,000	£0	£0	£7,250	£56,000
Holwell Village Hall	£100	£12,200	£0	£24,750	£0	£0	£3,750	£40,800
The Grange Community Centre	£500	£43,000	£500	£37,500	£500	£500	£6,000	£88,500
St Ippolyts Parish Hall	£0	£12,500	£0	£17,750	£0	£0	£4,000	£34,250
Jackmans Community Centre	£0	£31,000	£0	£37,250	£0	£0	£0	£68,250
Westmill Community Centre	£0	£55,500	£0	£55,500	£0	£0	£50,000	£161,000
Graveley Village Hall	£0	£60,000	£0	£9,500	£0	£0	£7,750	£77,250
St Johns Community Centre	£0	£11,500	£0	£21,000	£0	£0	£20,000	£52,500
Barley Town House	£0	£30,500	£0	£25,000	£0	£0	£20,000	£75,500
Breachwood Green Village Hall	£0	£31,750	£0	£47,500	£0	£0	£5,500	£84,750
Peters Green Village Hall	£3,250	£36,750	£0	£1,500	£0	£0	£53,750	£95,250
Pirton Village Hall	£0	£21,500	£0	£3,500	£0	£0	£5,750	£30,750
Mrs Howard Memorial Hall	£500	£7,250	£0	£5,500	£0	£0	£750	£14,000
Baldock Community Centre	£7,357	£43,107	£10,857	£55,357	£7,857	£7,857	£19,608	£152,000
Codicote Sports & Social Club	£0	£39,107	£357	£102,857	£0	£1,072	£25,357	£168,750
Ickleford Village Hall	£0	£23,000	£0	£9,000	£0	£0	£5,750	£37,750
Willian Village Hall	£6,000	£4,750	£0	£1,500	£0	£0	£71,250	£83,500
Knebworth Village Hall	£4,000	£5,750	£50	£13,550	£50	£1,550	£10,450	£35,400
Whitwell New Fellowship Hall	£23,850	£10,600	£7,100	£13,100	£7,100	£0	£33,500	£95,250
Preston Village Hall	£3,370	£5,244	£0	£4,116	£0	£0	£4,620	£17,350
Kimpton Memorial Hall	£1,500	£11,000	£0	£15,150	£0	£0	£12,000	£39,650
St Michaels Community Centre	£1,290	£23,285	£3,935	£8,685	£3,935	£3,935	£5,685	£50,750
Great Wymondley Village Hall	£5,200	£700	£700	£17,700	£700	£0	£24,000	£49,000
Codicote Peace Memorial Hall	£8,264	£5,514	£1,514	£43,014	£1,514	£715	£15,465	£76,000
Lilley Cassel Memorial Hall	£8,978	£728	£730	£6,480	£728	£178	£5,428	£23,250
Ashwell Village Hall	£7,500	£20,000	£2,500	£21,000	£2,500	£1,500	£42,250	£97,250
Great Ashby Community Centre	£2,000	£5,000	£500	£10,250	£500	£500	£2,500	£21,250
Barkway Village Hall	£4,750	£4,500	£1,700	£3,200	£1,700	£950	£34,850	£51,650
Wallington Village Hall	£6,600	£500	£500	£8,000	£500	£0	£11,250	£27,350
Hexton St Faiths Centre	£24,000	£26,500	£20,000	£0	£4,000	£0	£22,000	£96,500
<b>DISTRICT TOTALS</b>	<b>£153,695</b>	<b>£827,821</b>	<b>£85,878</b>	<b>£796,944</b>	<b>£46,503</b>	<b>£30,176</b>	<b>£626,133</b>	<b>£2,567,150</b>
<b>PERCENTAGE BY TIMESCALES</b>	<b>6.0%</b>	<b>32.2%</b>	<b>3.3%</b>	<b>31.0%</b>	<b>1.8%</b>	<b>1.2%</b>	<b>24.4%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

- 9.6** However the future of funding and operational support available from the Council in respect of these facilities is limited. It must be noted that most of the buildings are now ageing and require significant amount of investment to bring them up to current legislative requirements, and modern public operational expectations.
- 9.7** Given the current economic climate, with limited capital funding available, the Council will be able to address the major issues identified in the survey with regard to its community centres and halls. However as a responsible landlord it has some obligation to assist the centres' management committees to continue their operations in the best interests of their respective local communities.
- 9.8** What can be achieved however is for the Council to provide assistance in the operation and maintenance of the buildings such that management committees may achieve increased income and thus be able to tackle the more pressing issues identified in the condition survey of their building. This is also true with regard to the village hall sector, where the Council has no responsibility for the operation of the facilities, but has in the past via its Parish Amenity Capital Improvement (PACIF) rural grant fund been able to assist in the resolution of many building condition issues over the last five years. This scheme is now closed due to lack of funds.

The proposed nature and extent of possible support to community centres and village halls is considered later in this document.

## 10. Quality Standard of Existing Facilities

- 10.1** "Planning Obligations" are a possible source of finance for community facility reinvestment. The Department for Communities and Local Government 'Planning Policy Guidance 17 – Guidance for Open Space, Sport and Recreation (PPG17), paragraph 33, requires that:

*"Planning obligations should be used as a means to remedy local deficiencies in the quality or quantity of open space, sports, and recreational provision. Local authorities will be justified in seeking planning obligations where the quantity or quality of provision is inadequate or under threat, or where new development increases local needs. It is essential that local authorities have undertaken detailed assessments of needs and audits of existing facilities, and set appropriate local standards in order to justify planning obligations".*

- 10.2** An exercise was therefore undertaken to establish the quality of the community facilities operating in the District in order to be in a position to substantiate a requirement for developers to contribute towards the quality of existing centres and halls, within in a 800 metre catchment area, of any proposal for future housing developments.

This quality review was established from the overall assessment of the districts facilities described above with the results shown in **Table 12** below.

The facilities were assessed on the following criteria:-

- a: Compliance with primary DDA requirements
- b: General condition of premises
- c: Adequacy and condition of basic facilities
- d: Compliance with general health and safety regulation
- e: General amenities

**TABLE 12: Building condition quality assessment of Community Centres and Halls**

Property	Rating	Property	Rating
Ashwell Village Hall	76%	Lilley Cassel Memorial Hall	77%
Baldock Community Centre	61%	Mrs Howard Memorial Hall	79%
Barkway Village Hall	65%	Newnham Village Hall	60%
Barley Town House	60%	Offley Village Hall	61%
Bancroft Hall	40%	Peters Green Village Hall	55%
Breachwood Green Village Hall	55%	Pirton Village Hall	69%
Brotherhood Hall	38%	Preston Village Hall	51%
Cockernhoe Village Hall	100%	Radwell Village Hall	26%
Codicote Peace Memorial Hall	58%	Reed Village Hall	52%
Codicote Sports & Social Club	42%	Royston Day Centre	79%
Coombes Community Centre	75%	Rushden Village Hall	64%
Clothall Village Hall	100%	Sandon Village Hall	76%
Graveley Village Hall	47%	St Ippolyts Parish Hall	76%
Great Ashby Community Centre	82%	St Johns Community Centre	71%
Great Wymondley Village Hall	43%	St Michaels Community Centre	73%
Hexton St Faiths Centre	51%	The Grange Community Centre	49%
Hinxworth & Edworth Village Hall	82%	Therfield Fordham Memorial Hall	68%
Hitchin Town Hall	40%	Wallington Village Hall	63%
Holwell Village Hall	74%	Walsworth Community Centre	65%
Ickleford Village Hall	60%	Westmill Community Centre	66%
Jackmans Community Centre	59%	Weston Village Hall	79%
Kelshall Village Hall	50%	Whitwell New Fellowship Hall	51%
Kimpton Memorial Hall	80%	Willian Village Hall	43%
Knebworth Village Hall	76%	<b>DISTRICT AVERAGE</b>	<b>63%</b>

**10.3** Although not included in the survey that was undertaken in the early part of 2010 for the reason shown, the following facilities have been included in Table 12 on a comparison basis with those that were surveyed.

Clothall Village Hall: currently under re-construction  
 Bancroft Hall: surveyed in September 2009  
 Cockernhoe Village Hall: new hall completed in April 2010  
 Hitchin Town Hall: estimated assessment made against all other facilities

**10.4** **Table 12** allows for differentiation between the varying quality of the buildings surveyed by using a grading assessment as shown below:

0% - 20% very poor  
 21% - 40% poor  
 41% - 60% average  
 61% - 80% good  
 81% - 100% very good / excellent



- 10.5** As can be seen the average standard of the facilities within the district is calculated as 63% on the grading scale used. An example of a quality assessment record, for Willian Village Hall, is included as **Appendix 4** .
- 10.6** When considering a proposed development, and where there will be an impact on the use of an existing community facility near that development, we should look to collect developer contributions towards improving the quality of that facility so it's physical condition will make new residents keen to use it.
- 10.7** We can summarise this policy thus:

For any new housing developments impacting on the operational functionality of a local, existing, community facility within the urban or rural areas we will look to collect developer contributions to be used towards improving the quality of that facility in the light of its physical condition as assessed within this strategy.

## 11. Future Provision

- 11.1** The purpose of this strategy is to ensure that future needs for additional community facilities are properly identified. We need to ensure that we understand the nature of newly-arising needs and have mechanisms in place to enable the delivery of new facilities and extensions or improvements to existing facilities to meet these needs.
- 11.2** The nature of North Hertfordshire is such that we have a wide range of communities, each of which will have different levels of growth and different levels of current facilities. We therefore will need to address each community in turn to identify the most appropriate solution..
- 11.3** This section of the document works through the following steps in order to come to the tailored solutions:
- Audit existing level of provision in the district and compare against benchmarks elsewhere in order to identify a district-wide target standard for centres and halls in m<sup>2</sup> per person;
  - Set policy for general approach to new provision for different types of growth scenarios;
  - Compare current and anticipated future size of community with current provision to identify current and future levels of surplus or deficiency against the target standard; and
  - Set general policy for each community.

### Audit of Existing Level of Provision

- 11.4** First, we measure the existing size of the centres and halls across the district, as recorded, by parish in **Table 13** below. This shows that the total area of the district's current facilities, excluding 'other facilities', is 15,597m<sup>2</sup>.

**TABLE 13: Current Total Area of Community Centres and Halls**

Parish	Estimated Population (2011)	Estimated Population (2031)	Approx Total Community Space (m <sup>2</sup> )
Ashwell	1847	1910	256
Baldock	10206	13391	935
Barkway	745	843	272
Barley	644	661	279
Bygrave	229	229	0
Caldecote	18	18	0
Clothall (note a)	146	148	133
Codicote Memorial Hall (Hall + SSC)	3271	3391	573
Graveley	487	499	210
Great Ashby	5019	5824	361
Hexton	120	120	318
Hinxworth	293	296	315
Hitchin	34055	37126	2977
Holwell	372	372	236
Ickleford	1905	1933	275
Kelshall	148	148	199
Kimpton (includes Peters Green)	1996	2206	623
King's Walden (includes Breachwood Green)	922	929	491
Knebworth	4500	4978	446.6
Langley	172	176	0
Letchworth (includes Willian)	32988	35673	2539
Lilley	369	372	265
Newnham	99	99	126
Nuthampstead	129	129	0
Offley (includes Cockernhoe)	1377	1508	260
Pirton	1156	1160	470
Preston	351	353	117
Radwell	83	97	132
Reed	313	409	191
Royston	15694	18140	704
Rushden	224	224	142
Sandon	478	497	219
St Ippolyts	1769	1998	401
St Paul's Walden (includes Whitwell)	1206	1317	396
Therfield	490	494	200
Wallington	118	118	107
Weston	990	993	299
Gt. Wymondley	1072	1074	129
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>126004</b>	<b>139853</b>	<b>15597</b>

Note a) Still under construction

- 11.5** **Table 13** makes estimates about current and future numbers of households and population size. These estimates are based on the Council's emerging Core Strategy, which covers the period 2011 to 2031. The figures presented here are based upon delivering 7,000 dwellings in the area, 6,000 of which to meet locally-arising need and 1,000 dwellings for growth. As the Core Strategy is still being drafted there may be changes as it progresses. If there are major changes to the level or distribution of housing, then updates will be made.
- 11.6** It can be seen that the population of the district at mid 2011 is estimated at 126,004 people. The current amount of centres and halls space therefore represents 0.124m<sup>2</sup> per person – or 124m<sup>2</sup> for each 1,000 people i.e. 0.124m<sup>2</sup>.
- 11.7** Looking at recent development in the district, the best local indicator for an appropriate level of community space is Great Ashby. The community centre here was built to a size of 361m<sup>2</sup>. However, this has been found to be too small for the community it serves and an extension is proposed, which will bring the size up to 519m<sup>2</sup>.
- 11.8** The population of Great Ashby at 2011 is estimated as 5,019 people. The amount of floor-space per person of the community centre (once enlarged) is therefore 0.10m<sup>2</sup> per person. Our experience at Great Ashby suggests that it will be difficult to negotiate for a standard much higher than this, which may start having an impact on the viability of development or reducing the contributions which development may be able to make towards other essential infrastructure. Equally, the Great Ashby experience has shown that the community centre as originally built there was too small. We therefore look to set a standard of 0.10m<sup>2</sup> per person to use as a basis for negotiation for new development and to use as a benchmark for examining current levels of provision.
- 11.9** This 0.10m<sup>2</sup> standard is based on a place where the only community hall space is a managed hall. It is therefore appropriate for many of our rural areas and Great Ashby itself, but particularly in our towns there tend to be other facilities, as discussed in Section 8.4. Therefore in urban areas we have made an assumption that there is 40% more floorspace than the managed hall space in that town, so as not to overlook the important contribution that such other facilities make.

**Table 14: Comparison of m<sup>2</sup> / Person With Other Authorities**

Comparator standards for size of halls per person

Planning Authority	Centres / halls space in m <sup>2</sup> per person
Bracknell Forest, Berkshire	0.13
Wycombe, Buckinghamshire	0.14
Horsham, Sussex	0.15
Reigate and Banstead, Surrey	0.20
Taunton Deane, Somerset	0.20

- 11.10** We can summarise this policy thus:

For future planning of new housing developments where new community capacity is being considered we will apply a standard of 0.10m<sup>2</sup>. halls space per person.

- 11.11** Having established the target standard, we now turn to our general approach towards meeting newly arising needs for centres and halls.
- 11.12** The District is likely to be accommodating growth in a number of ways. There may be sizeable urban extensions, where effectively new neighbourhoods are created with their own identities. In these areas, we think it important that such new neighbourhoods have their own facilities. Based on recent experience we think that 500m<sup>2</sup> is about the minimum size required for a new urban community centre providing adequate rooms, hall space, storage and ancillary facilities such as toilets, bar area and office etc. Whilst each case will be assessed on its merits, this rationale can be demonstrated by the need to expand the community centre at Great Ashby, in the north east of Stevenage. This is currently being expanded from its original size of 361m<sup>2</sup> to 519m<sup>2</sup> to meet the increasing demands of an expanding community as part of continued housing development in the area. At 0.1m<sup>2</sup> per person, this implies a population of about 5,000 is required to justify a new centre, equating to about 2,100 dwellings at current average occupancy rates.
- 11.13** This size of development is however unlikely to occur in most of the district, with the exception of any possible growth of Stevenage. At the time of writing the Council's approach towards growth of Stevenage is still being determined, but if new neighbourhoods are to be created on the edge of Stevenage in North Hertfordshire, this is the type of situation where completely new facilities will be required.
- 11.14** For developments not large enough to justify their own centre (taking into account all the local characteristics) we will not automatically look for new community centres or halls to be provided, but look instead at the existing facilities in the area and their ability to be extended or be otherwise improved to meet the needs arising from the new development. This may include bringing buildings not currently (or only partially) in community use, such as school halls, into community use.
- 11.15** We can summarise this policy thus:

For any major new developments creating new communities we will look for new centres or halls to be provided as part of the development taking into account existing facilities. For all other developments we will look to collect developer contributions to be used towards the extension or other improvement of existing facilities in order to allow them to deal with the expected increase in demands placed upon them.

- 11.16** Growth rates by community
- 11.16.1** Having identified a district-wide target standard and the general policy to be taken towards new development, we now start to consider the implications at the more local level. We use the District's existing parish structure as a framework for assessing the growth at a more local level<sup>1</sup>.
- 11.16.2** **Table 15** below sets out estimates for the current population of each town and the projected population in 2031 based on anticipated growth in each under the Council's emerging Core Strategy 2011-2031. It must be stressed that these growth rates are in draft form and are subject to change. For towns where there are particular uncertainties, two levels of growth are considered. This applies to Hitchin, Royston and the North and West Stevenage areas. It can be seen that Baldock and Letchworth have modest shortfalls against a standard of 0.1m<sup>2</sup> per person at their projected 2031 populations, but probably not enough to justify a completely new centre. For Hitchin, under either growth option, there appears to be a surplus of community hall space. Royston shows a sizeable current deficiency, which is projected to have got worse by 2031, but this can be explained by the fact that the town's largest facility, Royston Town Hall, has not been included in the floor space calculations as it is technically an 'other urban facility' under

the definitions used in this document. For West and North of Stevenage, if development goes ahead there, then new facilities will be required as part of the development – the deficit figures here give a broad indication of what size of facility might be required.

**Table 15: Urban Areas, Projected Growth and Floor Space Surplus / Deficiency**

Town	Estimated population 2011	Existing managed floorspace (m <sup>2</sup> )	Uplift of 40% to account for other facilities	Target size at 0.1m <sup>2</sup> / person (2011)	Current surplus / deficit against target (2011)	Estimated population 2031	Target size at 0.1m <sup>2</sup> / person (2031)	Future surplus / deficit against target (2031)
Baldock	10206	935	1309	1021	288	13391	1339	-30
Great Ashby	5019	519	727	502	225	5842	584	142
Hitchin (option 1)	34055	2977	4168	3406	762	37126	3713	455
Hitchin (option 2)						36008	3601	567
Letchworth	32988	2539	3555	3299	256	35673	3567	-13
Royston (option 1)	15694	704	986	1569	-584	18140	1814	-828
Royston (option 2)						17678	768	-782
North Stevenage (including 600 dwellings in Stevenage)	0	0	0	0	0	3696	370	-370
West Stevenage (including 1900 dwellings in Stevenage)	0	0	0	0	0	8316	832	-832

#### Notes

- Alternative options at Hitchin and Royston reflect current uncertainty due to High Court proceedings challenging the West Stevenage planning permission.
- The figures include an extended facility at Great Ashby
- Treating Hitchin and Baldock as parishes despite technically being unparished areas.

**11.16.3** For the rural areas, we have undertaken a similar exercise on a parish by parish basis, as shown in **Table 16**. Four parishes (Bygrave, Caldecote, Langley and Nuthampstead) do not have any facilities, therefore their population figures have been added to the neighbouring parish most likely to serve their needs. Therefore Bygrave's population has been added to Ashwell, Caldecote's to Newnham, Langley's to St Ippolyts and Nuthampstead's to Barkway.

Table 16: Rural Areas, Projected Growth and Floor Space Surplus / Deficiency

Parish(es)	Estimated population 2011	Existing managed floorspace (m <sup>2</sup> )	Target size at 0.1m <sup>2</sup> / person (2011)	Current surplus / deficit against target in m <sup>2</sup> (2011)	Estimated population 2031	Target size at 0.1m <sup>2</sup> / person (2031)	Future surplus / deficit against target in m <sup>2</sup> (2031)
Ashwell & Bygrave	2076	256	208	48	2139	214	42
Barkway & Nuthampstead	875	272	87	185	973	97	175
Barley	644	279	64	215	661	66	213
Bygrave: see Ashwell	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Caldecote: see Newnham	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Clothall	146	133	15	118	148	15	118
Codicote	3271	573	327	246	3391	339	234
Graveley	487	158	49	109	499	50	108
Hexton	120	318	12	306	120	12	306
Hinxworth	293	315	29	286	296	30	285
Holwell	372	236	37	199	372	37	199
Ickleford	1905	275	191	84	1933	193	82
Kelshall	148	199	15	184	148	15	184
Kimpton	1996	623	200	423	2206	221	402
King's Walden	922	491	92	399	929	93	398
Knebworth	4500	447	450	-3	4978	498	-51
Langley: see St Ippolyts	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lilley	369	265	37	228	372	37	228
Newnham & Caldecote	118	126	12	114	118	12	114
Nuthampstead: see Barkway	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Offley	1377	260	138	122	1508	151	109
Pirton	1156	470	116	354	1160	116	354
Preston	351	117	35	82	353	35	82
Radwell	83	132	8	124	97	10	122
Reed	313	191	31	160	409	41	150
Rushden	224	142	22	120	224	22	120
Sandon	478	219	48	171	497	50	169
St Ippolyts & Langley	1941	401	194	207	2174	217	184
St Paul's Walden	1206	396	121	275	1317	132	264
Therfield	490	200	49	151	494	49	151
Wallington	118	107	12	95	118	12	95
Weston	990	299	99	200	993	99	200
Wymondley	1072	129	107	22	1074	107	22

**11.16.4** As can be seen from **Tables 15 and 16** the overall level of community facilities in the district is adequate and this is not projected to change by 2031 even taking into account projected population growth. However there are areas of deficit of facilities notably in Royston and North Stevenage and West Stevenage. In the two Stevenage areas there are currently no facilities, but any development that might occur as projected in the population figures shown in **Table 15** for 2031 would include the provision of adequate and appropriate community facilities as required by this strategy.

**11.16.5** In the case of Royston, although not operated by the District Council and considered elsewhere in this document as an 'other facility', when Royston Town Hall (which has approximately 560 square meters of community space) is specifically included in the calculations for existing managed floor space in **TABLE 15**, this indicates a current surplus of community facility capacity, with only small under capacity provision projected for 2031 in respect of Option 1, with an over provision indicated for Option 2. Currently there are plans however to provide a cinema for Royston, which for reasons of access, visibility, location and civic function is to be located in the Town Hall. The auditorium for the cinema is to be located in the upper hall. The ground floor - broadly similar in area to the upper hall – will serve as the cinema foyer, including ticket, sales, bar, etc. plus access to all toilets. This second hall will halve the existing community provision area. When not in use as a cinema it is envisaged that the upstairs hall will continue to be available for other appropriate community uses, such as meetings, dance clubs etc. With the cinema expected to open in 2012 it will be necessary to revisit the community capacity projections for the town shown in this strategy once the extent of space available for community uses can be re-quantified.

## **12. Community Facility – New Builds and Expansion**

### **12.1 New builds**

**12.1.1** Within this strategy we need to take into account the likely nature of the service provision from community facilities by new generations of people living in North Hertfordshire. This will help us define the need which will then lead us to define the nature, size and location of any community infrastructure required. This in turn will identify how such facilities may be operated and by whom, as we should not assume that the traditional models employed to operate such facilities in the past will remain efficient and be suitable for the future.

**12.1.2** Increases in community hall capacity provision in line with expansions in housing infrastructure, needs to be assessed on the basis of the following strategy rationale:-

**12.1.3** The survey of users of existing facilities undertaken as part of the consultation stage asked how far people were prepared to walk to their local community facility. Of the 706 who responded 354 (50.1%) said that they would be prepared to walk to it for ten minutes, which at an assumed walking speed of 3 miles/hr equates to an approximate journey of 800 metres. A further 171 (24.2%) said that they would be prepared to walk for 15 minutes (approximately 1200 metres) with the remainder saying that they were prepared to walk for 20 minutes or more.

Clearly to be able to serve its local community a new build facility should be located such that easy and comfortable access to it can be obtained.

We can summarise this policy thus:

**For any major new developments creating new communities we will look for new centres or halls to be located to ensure that the majority of local residents live within 800 metres of the facility.**

**12.1.4** In the past some community centres have been built by developers and passed over to the local authority or community without careful thought to how they will be used. This has resulted in problems for the operation of these facilities and costly changes having to be made to the buildings at the Councils expense. Agreeing a suitable scheme prior to construction will ensure that design, use, location and functions of new community centres will meet the needs of the local users, making them more efficient and cost effective to operate.

**12.1.5** Where a new build facility is proven to be justified the Council should work actively with the developer to determine the size of the building required, its design specification, and location within the development. Opportunities should be taken to attempt to co-locate facilities as part of the new build design wherever possible. In conjunction with the primary role of the new facility, such 'multi uses' could be developed by the inclusion of such services as, external sports provision, community policing, free internet access facilities, facilities for a wide variety of surgeries e.g. Age Concern, Money advice, case conferencing for Social Services etc. The need for such provision will of course need to be addressed at the design stage with the developer, and the potential service providers of those services. In this respect the Council will publish an "Employers Specification" to specify the nature and standard of facility to be constructed so that as many of the potential uses for the building are catered for at the design stage. Examples of some of the areas that will be included in an "Employers Specification" , unless there are good and acceptable reasons to agree otherwise, are shown as **Appendix 5**.

We can summarise this policy thus:

In cases where a new facility is proposed to be built by the developers or other agency, they will be required to work with the Council in relation to design and construction requirements.

**12.1.6** Where a new facility is required a temporary building should be deployed near to the eventual site of the facility when constructed, as part of the first phase of the development, to allow for the earliest possible establishment of a management committee for the new facility when constructed.

We can summarise this policy thus:

In cases where a new community facility is proposed to be built by the developers or other agency, a temporary facility should be put in place at the commencement of the development as adjacent as possible to the eventual site of the new permanent facility.

**12.1.7** Where it is proposed that the new ownership and responsibility for a new facility is to be transferred to the Council, the determination of the leasing terms will be undertaken between the Council and the developer separately. The development of the management committee and the subsequent establishment and operation of the new facility proper is to be at no cost to the Council.

We can summarise this policy thus:

In cases where a new community facility is proposed to be built by the developers or other agency, and where it is proposed to be transferred to the Council or other body, this must be at no cost to the council and therefore start up and operational costs will be required.



**12.1.8** It is felt that other than via a regeneration scheme which may require the replacement of an existing community centre, it is unlikely that any new build centres or halls will be required in the District's urban areas where existing 'overall' capacity, excluding Royston, is seen as being adequate for the foreseeable future, when provision provided by the other identified facilities in these areas is included.

## **12.2 Expansion**

**12.2.1** Where a localised increase in population requires an increase in community infrastructure capacity, the Council will seek to increase community provision by expanding existing facilities. This expansion either; (i) by providing an increase to the existing footprint, or (ii) by establishing a co-located solution where existing facilities in urban areas may be enhanced to provide a new element of service delivery. An example here might be to provide a community service within an existing school or church hall in an urban area where this had either not been previously available or had only been available to a limited degree.

We can summarise this policy thus:

In cases where increases in population occur in urban areas as a result of housing development, such that an increase in community facilities is identified, this increase will be sought at the cost of the developer through the expansion of existing services within that urban area. This policy of seeking expansion of services via existing alternative facilities may also be applied where a facility owned or operated by the Council is closed for redevelopment or other reasons.

**12.2.2** Given the number and distribution of the District's village halls, again other than by a new build resulting from a housing development, it is unlikely that any new such halls will be required in the foreseeable future. Where this is the case it is likely that the new facility will replace an existing one (e.g. Cockernhoe Village Hall) and as such the original management committee is likely to continue with the operational responsibility for the new hall.

**12.2.3** Where a new housing development does not generate enough need for incremental village hall provision, the payment of s106 planning developer obligations (in respect of community facilities) will be used to support the existing community facility serving the area. The Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document (as may be amended) refers to the amount payable in relation to community centres/halls.

**12.2.4** Future requirements for community halls in the District can be taken into account with already known or anticipated population growth information resulting from planned housing developments, as discussed earlier in this document.

## **13. Support to Community Facilities**

### **13.1 Community Centres and Halls**

#### **13.1.1 Maintenance Support**

**13.1.1.1** In October 2010 the Council entered into a partnership arrangement with two other local authorities in Hertfordshire (Stevenage Borough Council, and Broxbourne Council) to establish a property compliance and maintenance regime that will provide ongoing maintenance support in respect of all operational Council buildings and halls.

- 13.1.1.2** The primary aim of this regime which is managed by the Council's Property Services Department is to ensure that buildings which are used for the delivery of the authorities services, directly or indirectly, are in a safe condition, conform to statutory Health and Safety standards and are 'compliant' at all times.
- 13.1.1.3** Whilst this regime has as a matter of course been applied to the Council's managed halls discussed earlier in the document, it has now been extended to other facilities that are owned, and leased by the Council such as its stock of community centres. Inclusion in the scheme is purely voluntary on the part of community centre management committees, but given the advantages it is hoped that all will decide to take up the opportunity.
- 13.1.1.4** Inclusion of these facilities within this maintenance regime would assist the operating bodies to meet their legal and leased obligations in ensuring that the buildings are in a safe condition, conform to statutory Health and Safety standards and are 'compliant' at all times.
- 13.1.1.5** An additional benefit would be that the operating bodies of these facilities would benefit from the ensuing economies of scale in respect of repairs and maintenance costs that will result from such an arrangement. Membership of the 'regime' will for the foreseeable future be free to those facilities. However at some stage it will be necessary, when currently allocated funding runs out, for the Council to require a contribution from participating facilities. It is expected however that whatever annual figure may be determined it will still be cost effective for those facilities to remain in the scheme..
- 13.1.1.6** We can summarise this policy thus:

In addition to its obligations under leased terms we will seek to assist the District's community centre management groups in the performance of cost effective repairs & maintenance, and compliance activities through economies of scale under a formally managed and monitored process.

### **13.1.2 Operational Support**

- 13.1.2.1** From the Council's ongoing liaison with the various management groups operating its community centres it is clear that there are many differing methods of operation in place, some more effective than others.. This is not to criticise those volunteers that have devoted their time to run these buildings over many years in support of their local communities but to make a comment on what has been observed.
- 13.1.2.2** Whilst of course each community centre is run to meet the particular requirements of its local community, which will see localised variations of operation being needed and employed, there is no 'right' way to operate such facilities. It is believed however that there are some areas of operation where the Council could provide advice and guidance to bring about improvements and increased efficiency to the operation of some of these facilities, and build on 'Best Practice'
- 13.1.2.3** This might be achieved by the establishment of operational toolkits looking at such areas as licensing, insurance, health and safety, child protection and DDA considerations, the development of operating policies and procedures, developing rationales on methods of hire, advertising and promoting the facility etc. The Council's website already has an area for community centres giving details of their location and hiring facilities. This is updated on a six monthly basis. However not all centres have their own website to which links can be established, and where they do perhaps these could be improved to increase the public visibility of the particular centre concerned.

- 13.1.2.4** Assistance in financial modelling could be provided to allow appropriate hire rate schedules to be developed that appropriately equate to the true operating costs of the building such that operating sustainability can be maintained or improved.
- 13.1.2.5** Regular meetings could be organised throughout the year to allow centre managers to meet and network such that differing experiences and knowledge can be exchanged. To date two such meetings have been trialled and have been very well received.
- 13.1.2.6** Assistance in the overall 'governance' of the facilities could be provided to the centres' management boards and committees which would again help to develop a consistent and business-effective means of operating the facilities across the District to the benefit of the centres and the local communities that they serve.
- 13.1.2.7** We can summarise this policy thus:

**In addition to its obligations under leased terms we will seek to assist the District's community centre management committees in the establishment of best practice operational business modelling such that they are able to maximise their incomes, and minimise their costs, in order to improve sustainability performance and service delivery levels.**

- 13.1.2.8** Help with identifying possible sources of external grant funding could also be given in conjunction with help from other external agencies such as the North Herts. Council for Voluntary Services (NHCVS).

## **13.2 Village Halls**

- 13.2.1** With the end of the Council's Parish Amenity Capital Improvement fund (PACIF) in 2010/11 there are no longer large amounts of capital funding available to village halls for improvement projects as there have been in the recent past. Funding does continue however under the Council's Community Building Refurbishment Fund, although the extent of this is under current review and may be withdrawn in the next financial year.
- 13.2.2** Given that substantial funding support from NHDC is no longer available to village hall management committees, whilst the Council has no direct responsibility for these facilities, it recognises the important role that they play in community cohesion in the rural areas of North Hertfordshire. The Council is still therefore keen to offer the same areas of operational support to these facilities as described in Section 13.1 above in respect of community centres and to offer strategic assistance with, for example, external funding applications.
- 13.2.3** The surveys conducted as part of the development of this strategy received very positive feedback from many of the village hall managers, welcoming any assistance that the council might be able to provide to assist them in the operation of their facility.
- 13.2.4** Whilst these facilities would not be eligible to participate in the Council's maintenance regime much advice and assistance could still be given in relation to the safe and compliant operation of these buildings as could advice in terms of overall operational management.
- 13.2.5** Again the Council has an area on its website providing information on all of the district's village halls to assist in their promotion, and this will continue and be improved where ever possible.
- 13.2.6** The council will join with the support already provided to the village halls by the Community Development Agency (CDA) via its Village Halls Advisor, and that provided by the North Herts. Council for Voluntary Services (NHCVS), to provide further assistance

and support to these rural facilities as possible to ensure their continued success and sustainability.

**13.2.7** We can summarise the Council's policy with regard to future support of village halls thus:

The Council will support the operation of the District's village halls by continuing to promote their activities wherever possible and provide, in conjunction with other bodies and agencies, advice and non financial assistance as may be appropriate to ensure their operational sustainability within the limits of the resources as its disposal.

## 14. Consultation

- 14.1** In order to identify further information which may have not have been available during the site audits, the Council undertook a consultation exercise with community centres and village halls to gather more information about the management and operation of their facilities. Centre managers were asked about the operation of their facilities and we also attempted to find out some information from those attending the facilities in terms of the type of use they make of the facilities and how far they have travelled to it and by what means.
- 14.2** An operational survey of all of the facilities, based on SNAP principles, was undertaken to assess the quantitative and qualitative status of current provision, establish capacity surplus, identify deficiencies inadequacies and shortfalls in service provision, and quantify the facilities likely sustainability of the service provision to 2031. Facility operators were asked a series of questions about the operation of their centre / hall and hirers were asked to comment on their use of the facility.
- 14.3** All community centres and village halls were also contacted by letter to ask, in the absence of any future financial assistance being available from the Council to support their operation, what forms of other assistance could they suggest might be of benefit. Whilst one or two facilities responded to say that they felt no assistance was required from the Council, the majority were very receptive to the idea of operational assistance from the Council and were able to express many areas where help would be welcomed in furthering the effective operation of their facility.
- 14.4** Various means of consultation have been undertaken with Councillors to seek their views and recommendations on what should be addressed and included in this strategy. A cross-party Member Steering Group was established in July 2010 to give guidance and direction to officers developing the strategy.
- 14.5** In October 2010 a Member Workshop was held at Council offices to seek input on the requirements for the strategy from Members. This workshop was well attended and produced some valuable inputs for officers to consider in developing the various policies that have resulted. Further consultation with Members was undertaken in the latter months of 2010 when a paper was presented to all Local Area Committees outlining the proposals for a centres and halls strategy to be developed. All area committees declared their support for the development of a strategy.
- 14.6** A meeting was held in September 2010 between Council officers and managers of the Hitchin Community Centres where ongoing support was discussed. The meeting proved to be very productive with many suggestions made where assistance in improving the effectiveness of the operation of the facilities would be worth further exploration. The meeting also provided a good networking platform for the centre managers, most of whom had not met one another before, and provided them with an opportunity to share experiences of running their respective facilities. It was agreed that this forum should be continued in future and opened up to all community centre manager in the district. A

second successful meeting was held in February 2011 and the next one is planned for September 2011.

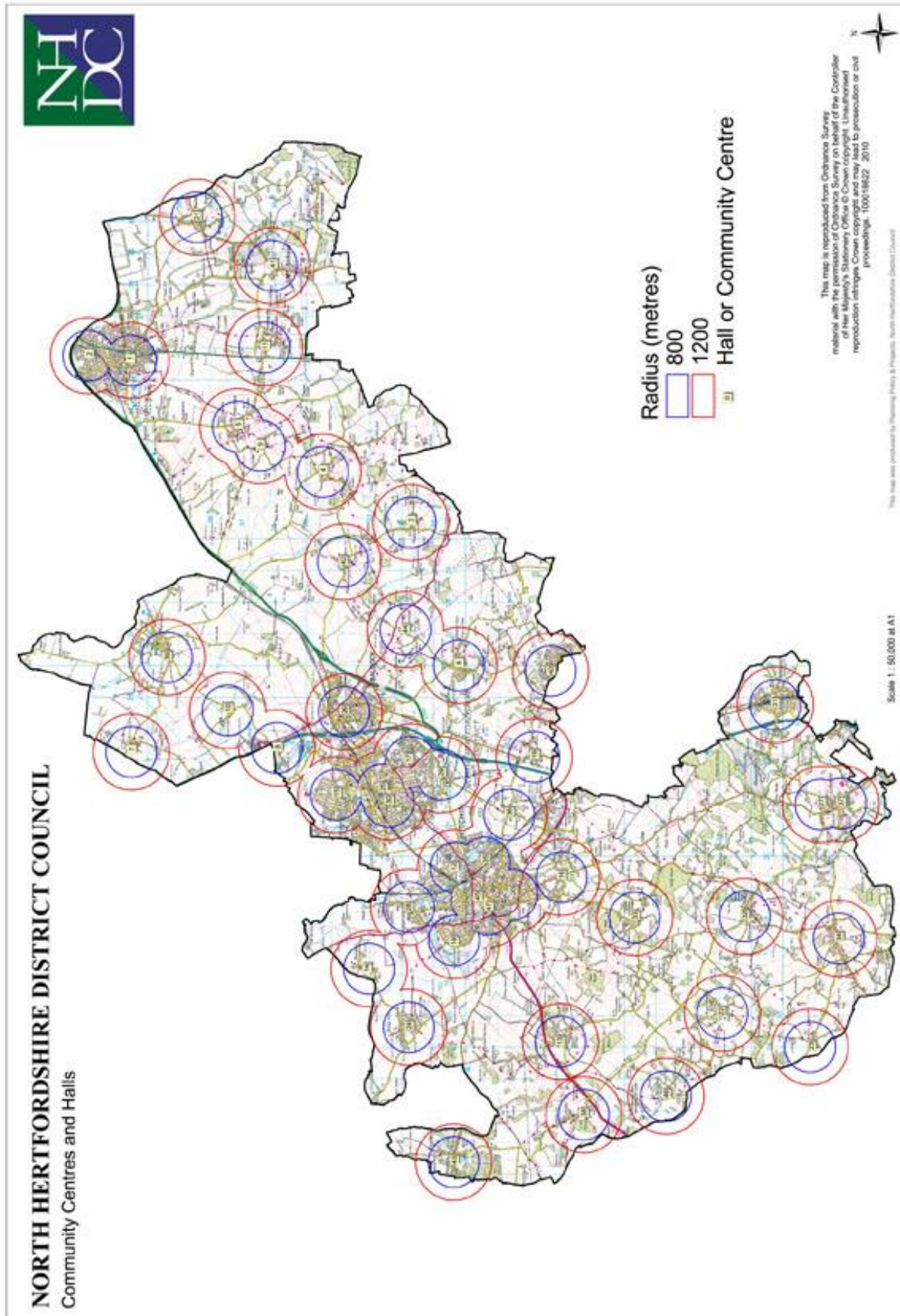
- 14.7** Following the presentation of this draft of the strategy to Cabinet it is proposed to submit the document to Council Area Committees, Parish Councils, urban community hall management committees, and the general public, for comment prior to a further presentation to Cabinet for comment leading to its adoption.

## **15. Policies Action Plan**

Given the comments and observations set out in the foregoing sections of this document, **Appendix 6** sets out the Council's policies in respect of the community halls in North Hertfordshire, and provides details and timescales regarding action plans to bring those policies into effect.

## 16. Appendices

### APPENDIX 1 – North Herts. centres and halls location diagram



## **APPENDIX 2 – Concessionary rate relief assessment**

### **Criteria considered when assessing an application for discretionary rate relief.**

- A. Is the application from a local community based organisation ?
- B. Is the organisation open to all members of the community ?
- C. Is there a cost of membership to the organisation ?
- D. Are the facilities considered to be appropriate to the organisations objectives ?
- E. Are the organisations facilities available to non-members ?
- F. Does the organisation provide education, training or supportive care ?
- G. Does the organisation already received financial assistance ?
- H. Does the organisation provide facilities that NHDC would wish to provide or complimentary to those facilities already provided ?
- I. Is the applying organisation affiliated to a local or national organisation ?
- J. Is the membership of the organisation made up of primarily local people ?
- K. What is the organisations current financial position ?
- L. What would be the organisations position if 'Relief' is not granted ?
- M. Is the organisations accommodation considered to be appropriate for the activities provided ?
- N. Is it in the interests of North Herts. Tax Payers to provide the 'Relief'?

**APPENDIX 3 – Example of detailed condition survey report – Willian Village Hall**

<b>BUILDING REF: Willian Village Hall</b>			
<b>WORK CATEGORY</b>	<b>PRIORITY</b>	<b>CONDITION</b>	<b>£</b>
<b>A. ROOF BUDGET</b>			
Coverings & Flashings	2 / 3	Plain tile roof - supports moss and algae. Assume some storm damage - sinking fund	1,500.00
Verge, soffit & Fascia		Mortar verge on scroll architectural barge boards painted black, black painted timber fascia, timber soffit	
Structure, chimneys & flues	1	Bolted white painted timber trusses with metal ridge rod & ridge plate. White painted timber lined sloping soffit with added plasterboard ceiling on bare timber hangers from trusses & bare timber ceiling joists. Check added loading acceptable structurally	250.00
Roof Drainage		PVCu gutters and downpipes.	
Roof Insulation & Sundries	4	Approximately 100mm compressed quilt to ceiling. Upgrade to 270mm (see note re structure capacity check)	750.00
<b>B. External Walls (parapets, cladding, DPC)</b>	4	Corrugated metal wall cladding painted white, except corrugated metal base plinth painted black. Painted brickwork to kitchen extension with black painted brick plinth. Investigate insulation and consider improvement.	50,000.00
C. External stairs & balconies	1	2 brick steps at front entrance, concrete step to external Male WC and step to concrete slab 230mm external Female WC. No grab rail for "high" step. Review and improve safe access	2,250.00
D. External Joinery (Doors windows putty glazing)		PVCu replacement double glazing	
E External Decoration		Good decorative order - assumed recent external refurbishment to walls	
F Buried Drains (Foul & SW)		Assumed some silting with age - allow to CCTV/jet clean	1,500.00
G Floor Construction & Finishes		Suspended timber ground floor, solid concrete slab to external toilet accommodation. Check suspended floor ventilation paths & clean/clear	250.00
<b>H Internal Stairs (Construct, Finish, Balusters)</b>	0		
J Ceiling Construct & finish		Plasterboard ceiling suspended on timber joists below trusses	
K Partition Construct & finish		Solid	
L Internal Doors & Joinery		Ply flush door to Kitchen	
M Internal Decs & Finishes	4	Good decorative order - note use of dehumidifier to control condensation. Domestic standard kitchen installed circa 4 yrs ago. Investigate insulation, heating & ventilation to control condensation. External toilet accommodation - investigate extension to accommodate internal and disabled toilet	15,000.00
<b>N Ext. hard &amp; soft Land, fences</b>	1	Concrete paving - cracked and lifting over recent cold weather. Take up and relay	1,500.00



WORK CATEGORY	PRIORITY	CONDITION	
P window clean/ lightning protect		Single storey - investigate safe access for cleaning/maintenance. Not important building - no lightning protection	250.00
R Deleterious material - asbestos, woodwool	1	Assumed lead in paints, arsenic in timber preservative, asbestos in toilet cisterns, sarking felt &c. Review and update registers.	500.00
S Fire - alarm, fight, compartment	1	No break glass fire call points. Review fire safety	1,000.00
<b>T Energy Conservation</b>	4	Assumed poor due to less than 100mm quilt on ceiling and assumed ineffective to walls and none to floors. Review heat loss and value for money/sustainability.	2,500.00
<b>V Mechanical - heat &amp; vent</b>	4	Electrical instantaneous wall heaters fixed at high level - appearance assume older style so may be inefficient. Ventilation to kitchen but condensation control by dehumidifier. Assume review for sustainability	3,000.00
<b>W Electrical</b>	1	Check PAT tests and certification current. Note use of fluorescent tubes without diffusers risk of broken glass.	
<b>X Disability Discrimination Act</b>	1 / 2	Stepped access & egress. External toilet accommodation - not suitable disabled. No designated parking/set down. Poor colour contrast (cream/white typically). Assumed no anti-scald to hot water. No hot water to external toilets - assume use of kitchen therefore potential contamination. No break glass fire alarm system. Assumed lead in old paints. Check anti-slip for vinyl sheet floor to Hall	2,250.00
<b>Y Acoustic, parking, amenity</b>	4	No designated parking/set down close to building. Uneven paving - frost damage	
Z Health & Safety Issues	1 / 2	Assumed lead in paint, arsenic, asbestos. No hot water to WC accommodation. No fire alarm system. Stepped access/egress. Fluorescent tubes w/o diffusers - glass breakage. Uneven paving - frost damage. Poor colour contrast. Assumed not anti-scald to hot water. Use of free-standing appliance (dehumidifer). Review	750.00
Any other sundries	1	Advise hire limitations	250.00
<b>TOTAL AMOUNT £</b>			<b>83,500.00</b>

**APPENDIX 4 – Example of detailed quality survey report – Willian Village Hall**

<b>Building 29: WILLIAN VILLAGE HALL</b>		
<b>WORK CATEGORY</b>	<b>CONDITION</b>	<b>POINTS</b>
<b>A. COMPLIANCE WITH PRIMARY DDA REQUIREMENTS</b>		
ACCESS	Entrance with up to 2 steps	3
TOILET FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES	Only general facilities	
<b>B. GENERAL CONDITION OF PREMISES</b>		
EXTERNAL	In good and substantial repair	5
INTERNAL	In good and substantial repair	4
<b>C. ADEQUACY AND CONDITION OF BASIC FACILITIES</b>		
KITCHEN	Modern in good condition	5
HOT WATER SUPPLY	Instantaneous	4
PLUMBING	H&C to kitchen only	3
TOILETS	No indoor toilet	
FURNITURE STORAGE	No space to provide storage	2
<b>D. HEATING</b>		
FUEL	Electricity instantaneous	3
EFFECTIVENESS	Fair	4
INSULATION	Poor	2
VENTILATION	Good extract system in the kitchen	4
<b>E. COMPLIANCE WITH GENERAL HEALTH AND SAFETY REGULATIONS</b>		
STEPS, PATHS, GATES	Need maintenance	
BOUNDARIES	Fair	2
OUTSIDE LIGHTING	Need maintenance	2
<b>F. AMENITIES</b>		
PARKING SPACES	No space available	
<b>TOTAL SCORE</b>		<b>43%</b>

## **APPENDIX 5 – Specification for new build community centres**

Example of areas to be included in an Employers Specification for the construction of a new community centre.

- A. Working environment
- B. Occupant comfort
- C. Environmental sustainability
- D. Energy efficiency
- E. Water conservation
- F. Healthy and sustainable materials
- G. Building construction, handover and ongoing management.
- H. Standard specifications
- I. Local issues relating to the site

**APPENDIX 6 – Policies Action Plan**

No:	Strategic Priority	Objective	Lead Department	Key Milestones and Tasks	Target Date	Traffic Light Green, Amber, Red	Link to Strategy	Comments on progress
1	Sustainable Town Centres	The urban halls operated by the Council should employ a differentiated range of hire charges that are more in line with the buildings' operating costs. This to eliminate / reduce the loss making scenario that has existed for many years, and has led to hirers being increasing subsidised by the North Hertfordshire tax payers.	Policy & Community Services	Assess hire rates of comparable facilities in the district	Complete	GREEN	Doc Ref 8.1	
				Calculate a table of charges based on previous user statistics by profile of hirer	Complete	GREEN	Doc Ref 8.1	
				Determine a required / realistic level of achievable increase in income based on previous usage analysis.		GREEN	Doc Ref 8.1	
				Introduce revised hire rates to achieve increased income		GREEN	Doc Ref 8.1	
2	Sustainable Town Centres	The Council will seek opportunities to 'partner' with external agencies, other service providers, or voluntary groups, such that overall levels and scope of service delivery of urban halls may be maintained or improved Where necessary to meet accessed need. Any such arrangement will need to be able to demonstrate benefit to and support from the local community, and be based on sound business planning and be at no cost to the Council.	Policy & Community Services	Assess possible options for the transfer of council operated community facilities to the voluntary sector.	As the need arises	GREEN	Doc Ref 8.1	
				Determine what level of support the council could cost effectively provide to enable an expressed interest to become viable. Engage with interested parties to seek the most beneficial leasing transfer solution to the local community at no operational cost to the council.	As the need arises	GREEN	Doc Ref 8.1	

No:	Strategic Priority	Objective	Lead Department	Key Milestones and Tasks	Target Date	Traffic Light Green, Amber, Red	Link to Strategy	Comments on progress
3	Value for money	Where a charitable organisation operating a community facility makes an application for discretionary rate relief the Council will assess the application based on the organisations financial position and 'other community' factors at the time of application to ensure that the support is justified. Should the application be granted the Council will keep the situation under review in accordance with the organisation's published annual accounts to ensure that relief continues to be appropriate	Revenues,Benefits and I.T.	Investigate extent of discretionary rate relief across the district and the criteria for it being granted.  Assess whether the criteria applied is sound and fair to all. Implement changes to process and review periods as appropriate to existing and new applications, to best advantage of the council.	As the need arises	GREEN	Doc Ref 8.2	
4	Value for money	When community centre leases come up for renewal the Council will seek opportunities to agree a renewal based on a repairs basis that is appropriate for the operation of the facility and provides value for money to the local taxpayer. The desire is to remove the burden of operating those buildings falling to the taxpayer who may not use them.	Finance, Performance and Asset Management	Assess current means of providing financial and other support to Community Centres under lease terms to see if still appropriate.  Eliminate any unnecessary financial support to the facilities in new leasing negotiations. Keep agreed repairs basis under regular review.	As the need arises	GREEN	Doc Ref 8.2	

No:	Strategic Priority	Objective	Lead Department	Key Milestones and Tasks	Target Date	Traffic Light Green, Amber, Red	Link to Strategy	Comments on progress
5	Sustainable	For any new developments impacting on the operational functionality of a local, existing, community facility within the urban or rural areas we will look to collect contributions to be used towards improve the quality of that facility in the light of its physical condition as assessed within this strategy.	Corporate Planning & Enterprise	Contact appropriate local community facilities or impacted Parish Council to determine basis of justification for contributions requirement. Inform NHDC Planning Dept of justification for requirement to developers for community hall contributions	As required	GREEN	Doc Ref 10.7	
6	Sustainable	For future planning of new housing developments where new community capacity is being considered we will apply a standard of 0.10m <sup>2</sup> halls space per person.	Corporate Planning & Enterprise	Through planning negotiations with developers ensure adequate new community hall provision is achieved in line with the NHDC district standard	As required	GREEN	Doc Ref 11.10	
7	Sustainable	For any major new developments creating new communities we will look for new centres or halls to be provided as part of the development taking into account existing facilities. For all other developments we will look to collect contributions to be used towards the extension or other improvement of existing facilities in order to allow them to deal with the expected increase in demands placed upon them.	Corporate Planning & Enterprise	Through planning negotiations with developers ensure existing community hall provision is maintained in line with the NHDC district standard either by extension of existing hall space or enhancement of the quality of existing hall space to meet increased demand	As required	GREEN	Doc Ref 11.15	

No:	Strategic Objective	Objective	Lead Department	Key Milestones and Tasks	Target Date	Traffic Light Green, Amber, Red	Link to Strategy	Comments on progress
8	Sustainable	For any major new developments creating new communities we will look for new centres or halls to be located to ensure that the majority of local residents live within 800 metres of the facility.	Corporate Planning & Enterprise	.Where a new community facility is required ensure that it is located such that easy and comfortable access to it can be obtained by the local community within acceptable timescales	As the need arises	<b>GREEN</b>	Doc Ref 12.1	
9	Sustainable	In cases where a new facility is proposed to be built by the developers or other agency, they will be required to work with the Council in relation to design and construction requirements.	Housing & Public Protection	Ensure that developers of new community halls provide a fit for purpose building, that meets local community needs and is designed to enable it sustainability without cost to the council.	As the need arises	<b>GREEN</b>	Doc Ref 12.1	

No:	Strategic Objective	Objective	Lead Department	Key Milestones and Tasks	Target Date	Traffic Light Green, Amber, Red	Link to Strategy	Comments on progress
10	Sustainable	In cases where a new community facility is proposed to be built by the developers or other agency, a temporary facility should be put in place at the commencement of the development as adjacent as possible to the eventual site of the new permanent facility.	Corporate Planning & Enterprise	Ensure that the planning process for any new housing development that is to include a new community facility requires the construction of a temporary facility be provided by the developer for as long as is required in the construction programme.	As the need arises	<b>GREEN</b>	Doc Ref 12.1	
11	Sustainable	In cases where a new community facility is proposed to be built by the developers or other agency, and where it is proposed to be transferred to the council or other body, this must be at no cost to the council and therefore start up and operational costs will be required .	Corporate Planning & Enterprise	Ensure that the planning process for any new housing development that is to include a new community facility requires developer to provide contributions for the establishment and sustainability of the new facility at no cost to the council.	As the need arises	<b>GREEN</b>	Doc Ref 12.1	



No:	Strategic Objective	Objective	Lead Department	Key Milestones and Tasks	Target Date	Traffic Light Green, Amber, Red	Link to Strategy	Comments on progress
12	Sustainable Town Centres	In cases where increases in population occur in urban areas as a result of housing development, such that an increase in community facilities is identified, this increase will be sought at the cost of the developer through the expansion of existing services within that urban area. This policy of seeking expansion of services via existing alternative facilities may also be applied where a facility owned or operated by the Council is closed for redevelopment or other reasons.	Corporate Planning & Enterprise	<p>Using the appropriate urban standard target figure assess the impact of all new housing developments on the extent of existing community services in terms of m<sup>2</sup> / person</p> <p>Determine from development plans if an increase in community service provision is required as a result of the development in order to maintain the urban standard target figure.</p> <p>Seek appropriate level of developer contributions to ensure that an increase in community service provision is achieved in line with the level of proposed development.</p>	As the need arises	<b>GREEN</b>	Doc Ref 12.2	
13	Sustainable Town Centres	In addition to its obligations under leased terms we will seek to assist the Districts community centre management groups in the performance of cost effective repairs & maintenance, and compliance activities through economies of scale under a formally managed and monitored process.	Finance, Performance and Asset Management	Assist current facility management committees to meet regulatory requirements and bring about cost effective maintenance of their buildings	April 2011	<b>GREEN</b>	Doc Ref 13.1	

No:	Strategic Objective	Objective	Lead Department	Key Milestones and Tasks	Target Date	Traffic Light Green, Amber, Red	Link to Strategy	Comments on progress
14	Sustainable	In addition to its obligations under leased terms we will seek to assist the Districts community centre management committees in the establishment of best practice operational business modelling such that they are able to maximise their incomes, and minimise their costs, in order to improve sustainability performance, and service delivery levels.	Policy & Community Services	Working with other agencies and community centre committees establish a standardised basis of halls operation via toolkits, processes and procedures such that operations of the facilities is maximised and cost efficiencies and savings may be achieved.	Ongoing	GREEN	Doc Ref 13.1	
15	Sustainable	The Council will support the operation of the District's village halls by continuing to promote their activities wherever possible and provide, in conjunction with other bodies and agencies, advice and non financial assistance as may be appropriate to ensure their operational sustainability within the limits of the resources as its disposal.	Policy & Community Services	Working with other agencies re-establish links with the districts Village Halls committees through newsletters and periodic workshops to assist those committees in the efficient operation of their facilities. This support to be non financial but will focus on the development of good working practices and general support in allowing compliance with impacting regulatory requirements for the operation of he buildings.	Ongoing	GREEN	Doc Ref 13.2	

## 17 Reference Documents

- 17.1 Village and Community Centres, The Charity Commission for England and Wales – Version December 2004
- 17.2 Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) – Governance Plus Project
- 17.3 NHDC Rural Strategy for North Hertfordshire 2010-2015
- 17.4 NHDC Sustainable Community Strategy 2009-2021
- 17.5 South Cambridgeshire District Council Community Facilities Assessment – Final Report September 2009
- 17.6 H.M. Department of Communities and Local Government Planning Policy Guidance 17, Guidance for Open Space, Sport and Recreation (PPG17)
- 17.7 Portsmouth City Council Culture and Leisure Executive Briefing Report, Community Centres Strategy – March 2006
- 17.8 Tameside Metropolitan Council, Hire Rates for Town Halls and Community Buildings – November 2009
- 17.9 NHDC Outdoor Sports Facilities Plan – 2010 – 2014
- 17.10 NHDC Report of the Strategic Director of Customer Services to Cabinet, Review of Voluntary Managed Community Centre and Village Halls – March 2005
- 17.11 NHDC AND Homes and Community Agency (HCS), Local Investment Plan 2011-2015
- 17.12 Infrastructure Delivery Plan for North Herts, Draft, April 2011