

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

LETCHWORTH COMMITTEE

**Meeting held in the Council Chamber, District Council Offices,
Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City
on 19 September 2007 at 7.30p.m.**

MINUTES

PRESENT: *Councillors: D. Levett (Chairman), Melissa Davey (Vice-Chairman), John Booth, J.M. Cunningham, Gary Grindal, T.W. Hone, Arthur Jarman, David Kearns, and Ian Mantle.*

IN ATTENDANCE: *Stuart Izzard (Senior Community Development Officer), Ashuk Ahmed (Community Development Officer), Susanne Gow (Committee & Member Services Officer).*

ALSO PRESENT: *5 members of the public.*

40. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed all those present to the Letchworth Committee Meeting and thanked Chief Inspector Geoff Camp, Inspector Jason Thorne, Sgt Steve Oliphant and Sgt Steve Gibbs for the interesting and informative presentations they had provided during the pre-meeting Community Safety Open Forum which had just ended.

41. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Simon Bloxham, Allison Dear, Lorna Kercher and Lynda Needham.

42. MINUTES – 25 JULY 2007

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 25 July 2007 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

The Chairman informed the Members that a letter of thanks had been received from Letchworth Garden City Rugby Club. This was for the financial assistance they had received from the Letchworth Committee towards funding a Mini-Rugby Festival during September 2007, involving 7 to 12-year-olds from Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth and Royston.

43. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was submitted for consideration by the Committee.

44. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interests were made during the meeting.

45. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no items presented under Public Participation.

46. REVIEWS OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS

The Democratic Services Manager submitted a report of the Returning Officer on the reviews of polling districts, polling places and polling stations required by the Electoral Administration Act 2006.

The report was presented in order that the Letchworth Committee could consider any appropriate revisions to the existing polling districts and polling places, and so they could express their views on the location of the polling stations within the area. Considerations to be taken into account included: accessible and convenient polling stations; the size of the polling place; and to note that each parish or community should have their own polling place where possible.

The Letchworth Committee discussed the report, and commented on the possible closure of either Radburn or Lannock Junior schools on the Jackmans estate, resulting in the loss of a polling station.

The point was raised that there had been a great increase in postal voting, which was expected to continue to for several more years, and therefore some polling stations may not be required in the future, and others may need to be relocated according to the siting of the electorate who wish to attend a polling station to vote.

It was remarked that Lordship Farm School contained two polling stations for different Wards, and that the signage for the entrances to each Ward had caused voters confusion in the past. Each entrance needed to be clearly marked as to which Ward it represented, and the Democratic Services Manager agreed that while one school hall containing two polling stations belonging to different Wards was not ideal, at the next election the entrances would be labelled clearly.

However, as there were no better alternatives to the remainder of the polling districts, places and stations in Letchworth, Members agreed that it was appropriate to accept the current arrangements.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the current scheme of polling districts and polling places within the area of the Committee be confirmed;
- 2) That comments relating to the location of the polling stations be relayed to the Returning Officer.

REASON FOR DECISIONS:

To enable the Council to review the Local Authority's polling districts and polling places.

47. LETCHWORTH TOWN TWINNING – 25TH ANNIVERSARY YEAR WITH WISSEN (2008)

Jon Marshall of the Letchworth Town Twinning Association gave an oral presentation on the Association's plans to celebrate 25 years of town twinning with Wissen, Germany in 2008.

Mr Marshall explained that the object of town twinning was to encourage links between ordinary people in each twinned town so that they could interact with each other in different countries.

Mr Marshall informed the Committee that Letchworth Garden City was in a triangle of town twinning, and 2008 would see Letchworth achieve 25 years with Wissen in Germany, 30 years with Chagny in France, and it would be 40 years of twinning

between Chagny and Wissen. Letchworth was also twinned with Kristiansand in Norway.

Jon Marshall went on to state that the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation had completely cut their grant to the Letchworth Town Twinning Association, and that hosting a visit from Wissen would cost around £1,800. To host Chagny would cost about £1,300, and both of these were expected in 2008 as it was a special anniversary year. Currently Letchworth was losing money on the twinning, although some events were planned for the rest of the year to try and generate more funds.

Mr Marshall assured the Committee that on visiting Wissen and Chagny, visitors from Letchworth were treated extremely well, and it was essential that the visitors from Wissen in October 2008 were given an experience to be remembered, and that Letchworth was not embarrassed by the paucity of the hospitality it offered. Plans had been made for a twinning dinner to be held in the Spirella Ballroom, and quotations varied between £22 per head for a cold buffet and £28 per head for a hot meal. With regard to any financial help available, the sum of £5,000 would be very welcome. North Hertfordshire District Council, Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation and Letchworth Town Council had been approached for funding.

Finally, Mr Marshall stated that all North Herts District Councillors would be welcome to attend the town twinning celebrations in 2008.

The Chairman thanked Mr Marshall for his interesting presentation, and confirmed that this appeal for financial assistance would be dealt with at Item 11.

During a short discussion by the Committee Members, two pertinent questions were asked:

- Does North Hertfordshire District Council have a policy of celebrating “special birthdays/occasions” such as the two Town Twinning anniversaries?
- Does the Chairman of the Council have provision in his budget to help host Chagny’s visit in 2008 to Letchworth?

48. IRONHOUSE/IRONFIST BOXING CLUB, LETCHWORTH

No representatives from the Ironhouse/Ironfist Boxing Club attended, so this item was deferred until such time as a representative from the organisation attended a Letchworth Committee Meeting.

49. LETCHWORTH ARTS CENTRE PROGRAMME AND ACTIVITIES - UPDATE

An extremely interesting and entertaining oral presentation was given by Maria Iredale, Chief Executive of the Letchworth Arts Centre on its background. She then reported on the activities currently taking place at the Letchworth Arts Centre, and touched on highlights of the courses, summer schools, adult education, art exhibitions given by both local and internationally-renowned artists, the June festival, drama, poetry, music and comedy acts and the variety of artistic media used at the Centre.

She gave details of the difficulties faced by the organisation over the past year, but said that there had been a 16% increase in income from the courses. Some income had been generated by creating murals, such as the one on the Grange estate, and there was a café and a bar at the Letchworth Arts Centre which generated funds, but one of the major lack of resources was in the area of staffing. The Centre could only afford to employ two paid staff, but had 17 volunteers who covered the hours that the Arts Centre was open, 7 days a week.

The Letchworth Arts Centre generated custom by means of the Press and its website as well as by “word of mouth”, and Maria Iredale compared its assets with the St Albans and Hemel Hempstead Arts Centres, both of which had better resources by way of staff and funding.

The Letchworth Committee Members asked questions and made suggestions, and Maria Iredale was pleased to give her opinion that the Letchworth Arts Centre should be self-financing after three years. A suggestion was made that as 2008 was a special year for town twinning with Wissen and Chagny, there might be a shared art exhibition with Letchworth's twinning partners, and this was well received.

The Chairman thanked Maria Iredale for her memorable presentation and stated that the Members of the Committee would be interested in viewing a copy of the Powerpoint presentation she had brought with her. This presentation would be copied and dispatched to Committee Members.

50. CHAMPION NEWS

The Senior Community Development Officer (SCDO) introduced Ashuk Ahmed to the Letchworth Committee, a new colleague who would, after a short period of training, be the new Community Development Officer (CDO) for Letchworth. Ashuk stated that he would like to meet the Members individually and to look round their Wards.

The SCDO then presented a report from the Head of Community Development & Cultural Services to the Committee, which set out the activities undertaken for Letchworth Garden City since the meeting of the Committee held on 25 July 2007, and brought to Members' attention some important community-based activities that would be taking place during the next few months.

Jackmans Youth Provision

The SCDO had been notified that despite Hertfordshire County Council having allocated several part time Youth Workers to deliver activities on dedicated evenings, they sometimes did not turn up, and gave very little notice, leaving the children feeling let down. It was agreed by the Committee that it was vitally important that the professional Youth Workers attended when they were contracted – and paid – to, and did not cancel at the last moment. One suggestion was that voluntary Youth Leaders were recruited, to assist those appointed by Hertfordshire County Council.

It was suggested that the local County Councillor be contacted, and the Committee's severe disappointment was expressed that the current Youth Workers were not satisfactorily carrying out their duties.

Grange Youth Provision

The Committee was informed that the Youth Workers assigned to the Grange would be there until May 2008.

Rap-Aid Football Festival, 18 August 2007

The Committee agreed that the Football Festival had been a success, and that the training and Festival should be run annually in the future.

Letchworth Youth Council

The Letchworth Youth Action Group had carried out joint projects and work with teams from the Grange, Jackmans Estate, and the Wilbury and Westbury areas.

The object of forming a Youth Council was to develop a more formal arrangement, so that young people could meet Councillors in a youth-friendly environment to advise them what they wanted in Letchworth.

Grass Verges

The Senior Community Development Officer's report was mainly for Letchworth Committee Members' information. After some discussion, it was still unclear whether Hertfordshire Highways were choosing not to enforce verge parking. It was agreed that Hertfordshire County Council should be co-operating with North Herts District Council on this matter.

With regard to damaging grass verges, it was pointed out that it was not just car parking that was to blame: houses undergoing renovation often placed skips and other detritus on grass verges, and heavy vehicles bringing building materials and collecting skips could severely damage the verges. A suggestion was made to add conditions onto planning applications to ensure that verges outside houses were restored to a good state on completion of the house renovation or building work. A further suggestion was made that Council Policy should make this a standard condition of all planning applications throughout the North Hertfordshire area.

The following points would be revisited for further discussion at the next Area Committee Meeting on Wednesday, 21 November 2007:

- Parking on grass verges
- Use of grass verges
- Conditions to be put onto each planning application
- North Hertfordshire District Council having the power to enforce penalties for destruction of grass verges.

Westbury Area Community Action – Wednesday, 26 September 2007

It was confirmed that Members of Letchworth Committee would be welcome to attend the Open Evening of the Westbury Area Community Action Group to see for themselves the progress being made with integrating the local community into the formation of a community association.

Town Centre Christmas Festivities

A provisional programme for the Letchworth Town Centre Christmas festivities was given. However, the Members suggested that the organizers of the Christmas Festivities should co-ordinate with non-involved organisations to publicise the events, and to this end the SCDO was asked to report back to the next Letchworth Committee Meeting on 21 November with a firm programme.

The Chairman thanked the Senior Community Development Officer for his comprehensive report.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the actions taken by the Senior Community Development Officer to promote greater community capacity and well-being for Letchworth Garden City be endorsed;
- (2) That a report be presented to the next meeting of the Committee regarding the destruction of grass verges by whatever means (as stated above), and the possibility of adding a standard condition to granting planning permission in order to ensure that grass verges in Letchworth are restored to their previous condition after house refurbishment has been completed;
- (3) That the Senior Community Development Officer report back to the next meeting of the Committee on 21 November 2007 with a firm programme for the Letchworth Town Centre Christmas Festivities.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To keep Members of the Committee apprised of the latest developments in community activities in Letchworth Garden City.

51. LIGHTING ISSUE IN HASELFOOT

The Chairman had stated that this issue would be discussed after Champion News, and after some discussion, it was acknowledged that there was a definite problem with a dark spot outside the bungalows, and that an extra lamp post situated there would make a big difference and reassure the residents of the bungalows and passing pedestrians after dark. However, Hertfordshire Highways, whilst acknowledging the problem, were unwilling to take any action, and the suggestion

was made that this issue was passed to the next meeting of the North Hertfordshire Highways Partnership Joint Member Panel.

RECOMMENDED TO NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE HIGHWAYS PARTNERSHIP JOINT MEMBER PANEL: That the issue of extra lighting in Haselfoot, Letchworth, be placed on the Agenda of the next meeting of the North Hertfordshire Highways Partnership Joint Member Panel on 15 October 2007 for discussion and resolution.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To support the residents and pedestrians of Haselfoot, Letchworth, on the grounds of highway and pedestrian safety.

52. LETCHWORTH COMMITTEE DEVELOPMENT & AREA VISIONING BUDGETS 2007/2008

The Community Development Officer (CDO) presented a report of the Head of Community Development & Cultural Services to the Committee, which set out the current expenditure and balances of the Area Committee delegated budgets. He also brought to the Committee's attention details of recent requests received for Area Committee Development Discretionary Grant Funding, made by community groups and local organisations.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the budgetary expenditure, balances and carry forwards from the Development Budgets and the Visioning Budgets be noted;
- (2) That a grant of £1,000 be allocated as support funding associated with the Town Twinning 25th Anniversary Celebrations, subject to any other funding arrangements the North Herts District Council will make;
- (3) That the sum of £250 be allocated to the start-up and support fees associated with the development of the Friends of Mrs Howard Gardens Group;
- (4) That £500 be allocated towards extra lighting in Haselfoot, subject to this sum being matched with £500 from Hertfordshire Highways;
- (5) That each grant application be presented on the standard grant application form to the Letchworth Committee prior to the release of any funds.

REASONS FOR DECISION: The allocation of funds will improve the services provided by local organisations and groups that are available and accessed by members of the community.

The meeting closed at 10.05p.m.

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Chairman