

**Overview & Scrutiny
3 December 2013**

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

AGENDA ITEM No.

12

**TITLE OF REPORT : MID YEAR MONITORING REPORT ON PROJECTS IN THE
PRIORITIES FOR THE DISTRICT 2013/14**

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

PORTFOLIO HOLDER: COUNCILLOR DAVID LEVETT

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This monitoring report provides an update on the delivery of the projects identified in the Priorities for the District 2013/14.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That delivery against the key projects stated in the Priorities for the District 2013/14 be noted and commented on by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To enable achievements against the Priorities for the District 2013/14 to be considered.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 There are no alternative options as this is a monitoring report.

5. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS

- 5.1 No external consultation has been undertaken in the preparation of this report. Members will, however, be aware that reports were taken to Overview & Scrutiny (19 March 2013), Cabinet (26 March 2013) and Council (11 April 2013) on the Priorities for the District 2013/14.

6 FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key decision and has not been referred to in the Forward Plan

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 This report provides details on the status of the various projects identified in the Priorities for the District 2013/14. It does not include any projects initiated after the document was agreed and is not a full report on all of the projects that the Council is undertaking. A full copy of this document is available via the following internet link. <http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/nhdcprioritiesforthedistrict2013-14.pdf>

7.2 The Priorities for the District 2013/14 was approved at the Council meeting on 11th April 2013. This contained a number of high level actions against each Priority.

7.3 This report summarises the status of each of the high level actions in the Priorities for the District 2013/14. Overall, good progress has been made.

8. LIVING WITHIN OUR MEANS TO DELIVER COST EFFECTIVE SERVICES

8.1 The Council continues to seek opportunities for delivering our services in different ways to ensure we deliver economic and efficient services that continue to support the delivery of our priorities. The following specific projects were identified in the Priorities for the District.

8.2 **2013/14 Budget Efficiencies.** In setting the 2013/14 budget efficiencies of £850,000 were agreed.

8.3 **North Hertfordshire Museum and Community Facility.** This applies to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a second-round application for funding of £831,000 for “fit out” costs in November 2013. This project will result in long term revenue savings for the Council. The signing of the Development Agreement enables Hitchin Town Hall Ltd to secure a £850,000 grant and loan from the Adventure Capital Fund. (See also 8.8)

8.4 **Parks for People Lottery Bid for Bancroft Gardens.** Tenders have been returned to appoint a Landscape Architect for the project. A bid will be submitted for a Parks for People lottery bid in February 2014 with an aim to minimise ongoing revenue expenditure.

8.5 **Value for Money Service Reviews.** Three formal reviews are underway on the Accountancy Service, use of Acolaid (planning, environmental health and land charges database software) by Development Control and the Planning Policy service. The outcomes from these reviews will be reported to the Committee later in the financial year.

8.6 **Alternative means of service delivery.** No specific projects were identified in the Priorities for the District. Work has however commenced in conjunction with seven other Hertfordshire authorities on an alternative model for the provision of Building Control funded by East of England Local Government Association.

8.7 WORKING WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES

The Council continues to work with local communities. Our team of Community Development officers work with many groups and organisations across the District to promote community participation.

8.8 **North Hertfordshire Museum and Community Facility.** The building works have now commenced. The project timetable was slightly delayed by the inclusion of 15 Brand Street to provide a more imposing and spacious reception area. In addition to providing the Council with savings in revenue (mentioned in section 8.3 of this report), through partnership working with Hitchin Town Hall Ltd, this project will deliver a refurbished community facility and museum.

8.9 **Civic Centre (Town Hall) Site, Royston.** The progress of this project continues to be reliant on HCC (the biggest landowner). There has been little interest from the main landowner to drive on with the development of this site and NHDC is unable to take this forward and prepare a planning brief for the site without all parties commitment. It is proposed that this project be taken forward as a development site within the Local Plan and is removed from the Priorities for the District. This is to be discussed with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport & Enterprise.

- 8.10 **Churchgate.** On 18 July 2013, Council considered all the potential options on the way forward to allow Members to consider the future of the Churchgate area. Council resolved to:
- (i) await the publication of the draft Local Plan, whilst at the same time considering the approach to take;
 - (ii) continue an open dialogue with interested developers on the Churchgate site in the interim; and
 - (iii) not enter into any form of exclusive discussions with Hammersmatch, based on the limited information currently provided due to the early stage their proposals are at, and that officers continue dialogue with Hammersmatch in accordance with ii) above.
- 8.11 **Hitchin Swim Centre and Archers Fitness Club.** Work started in September 2013 to provide a brand new changing village and multi purpose fitness rooms. The changing village will allow more flexibility for people using the pool such as parents wanting to change with their children. They are also more secure and easier for staff to monitor. The new multi purpose fitness rooms will enable a wide range of fitness activities to be offered.
- 8.12 **Business Improvement District (BID) for Letchworth.** The Council endorsed the proposals for a BID in Letchworth and a successful ballot was held in October. The BID enables for local businesses to come together to plan and implement activities that will further develop their trade.
- 8.13 **Baldock Town Hall.** The Council agreed a lease with the Baldock Town Hall Group (BTHG) to transfer the building to the local group on a 99 year lease. BTHG plans to ensure that the building will be used for the benefit of people from Baldock and beyond, primarily offering space for the development and performance of the creative and performing arts, and incorporating Baldock Museum; the facility is to be known as the 'Baldock Arts and Heritage Centre'. The first events were held at the Town Hall in October, and a formal opening for invited guests will take place at the end of November.
- 8.14 **Bakers Close Pavilion** Officers have provisionally looked at possible future usage plans for the pavilion based around soccer being the primary usage, but have also considered the facility being a resident home/venue for other sporting activities, as well as possible being available for day time use by non-sporting community groups. Support is being given to enable interested parties to develop a business case.
- 8.15 **Sports pavilion, Baldock Road, Letchworth** Work is ongoing with the football league to develop the new facility. Outline designs for a replacement facility have been prepared.
- 8.16 **Local Plan.** Consultation was undertaken in February 2013 on the level of housing growth for the District to 2031 and proposed land allocations which could be used for building new homes. A further round of consultation on proposed additional sites was undertaken in July 2013. Over 12 000 representations have been received to both consultations. The proposed Local Plan submission document will be available for consultation in 2014.
- 8.17 **PROTECTING OUR ENVIRONMENT FOR OUR COMMUNITIES**
The Council delivers a number of services that impact on the environment and our policies and approach to planning, affordable housing, environmental management, etc all reflect the wider aims of our Climate Change Strategy. The following are projects through which we are reducing the Council's impact on the environment and improving facilities for all.

- 8.18 **New waste and recycling service.** The introduction of a new recycling service for all households and food waste collections for flats has reduced the amount sent to landfill by 34 kilograms per household in the first six months of the year. The percentage of household waste sent for reuse recycling or composting increased to 57.23 % by the end of September 2013 which compares favourably to the figure of 52.59% attained in the same period in 2012/13. It is likely that the recycling rate will drop off slightly in the winter months and will pick up again in the spring.
- 8.19 **Improved lighting and heating controls in the District Council Offices.** Some sensor lighting controls have been installed in the Offices. Now that a decision has been reached for the long term provision of office accommodation, further improvements will be included in future refurbishment works. In the meantime, sun tubes have been included in the specification to re-roof the Council Chamber and Committee rooms 1 and 2.
- 8.20 **Implementation of Green Space Strategy.** There were a number of projects linked to this strategy that are to be delivered in 2013/14. These included:
- The opening of the a water splash feature at Avenue Park in Baldock. The water from this will be used to irrigate the bowls and cricket greens and potentially the adjacent flower beds.
 - As previously mentioned in section 8.4, a Parks for People Heritage Lottery Fund bid will be submitted for renovation and restoration works at Bancroft Park in Hitchin.
 - There has been a delay to the replacement of the access bridge to Walsworth Common. It has been agreed that the access bridge will be replaced with one which is able to support more substantial road vehicles than the existing to enable the Common to be more widely used for community events. In view of this, additional funding needs to be secured and the Countryside Management Service (CMS) will be assisting with attracting additional grant funding to enable this to be delivered - but this will not be completed in 2013/14.
- 8.21 **Purwell Meadows.** Work with the CMS commenced and have progressed well over the spring and early summer of 2013 to improve the access and maintain and improve the habitat at Purwell Meadows. Work is now underway to develop the interpretation aspect of the project with leaflets and on site signage.
- 8.22 **Energy audits.** Quotations have been obtained and are being evaluated for energy audits to be undertaken to a number of Council premises including Leisure Centres. Following these audits, plans will be developed to implement those items with a proven payback.
- 8.23 **Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.** Discussions have taken place with The Chilterns Conservation Board and Hertfordshire County Council to seek their support in progressing an application for extending the AONB Boundary. Officers through the Chilterns Conservation Board have submitted a formal application to Natural England for their consideration. Progression of this work is subject to further guidance by Natural England. Officers will continue to track progress and engage positively with the Chilterns Conservation Board and Natural England on how this proposal is progressed.

8.24 **Responding to the planning application for the proposed extension of Luton Airport.** Following the decision of the Planning Control Committee on 18 April 2013 to raise a number of formal objections to the Luton Airport expansion plans, officers are working with Luton Borough Council (LBC) to understand progress of the planning application. It is likely, although subject to when LBC set a Committee date, that further reports will be presented to the Planning Control Committee to clarify the Council's response to the planning application in light of further information that comes to light, including the forthcoming decision of the Airports Commission on future options for short term increases in airport capacity (the initial report is expected December 2013). Officers will continue to track progress and engage positively with Luton Borough Council and Hertfordshire County Council on how this important proposal is progressed.

8.25 **Town Wide parking reviews – commencement of a Letchworth review** Town wide parking reviews take at least three years, with the first year being spent on investigating issues, undertaking site visits and preparing a scoping report setting out suggested options for consideration and agreement by local Members and the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport & Enterprise. An initial scoping report identifying key issues has been presented to Letchworth Area Committee. Officers are undertaking initial site investigation of the issues raised before presenting an options report to Letchworth Committee in early 2014 for their agreement on schemes to be progressed. Baldock, Hitchin and Knebworth reviews are almost completed.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no legal implications arising from this monitoring report.

9.2 Overview and Scrutiny's terms of reference include "to review performance against the Council's agreed priorities and scrutinise the performance of the Council in relation to its policy objectives, performance targets and/or service areas

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The actions identified were resourced through the corporate business planning process cycle for 2013/14 that was undertaken in 2012/13. A number of these projects formed part of the Council's capital programme for 2013/14..

10.2 It is clear that the Council will continue to face difficult spending decisions in view of the current economic climate and the likely reduction in government support in future years and that the availability of funding will impact on the projects that can be undertaken.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1 As key projects for the Council, where relevant, each project has its own project risk log that is maintained by the Project Manager and reviewed by the Project Board. Some high value/cross cutting projects are considered as Top Risks for the Council and these will be monitored throughout 2013/14 by the Finance Audit and Risk Committee

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of its functions, give **due regard** to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

- 12.2 By reporting delivery against the Priorities for the District 2013/14 this provides a means to monitor whether the council are meeting the stated outcomes of the district priorities, its targets or delivering accessible and appropriate services to the community to meet different people's needs. This assists the Council to fulfil a number of its obligations arising from the Public Sector Equality Duty.

13 SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 As the recommendations made in this report do not constitute a public service contract, the measurement of 'social value' as required by the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 need not be applied, although equalities implications and opportunities are identified in the relevant section at paragraphs 13.
- 13.2 Where the key projects referred to in this report relate to the award of a public service contract, 'social value' will be captured and reported in accordance with the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012.

14 HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 There are no additional human resource implications arising from this monitoring report. The resources needed to deliver projects should be considered through the Corporate Business Planning process.

15. CONTACT OFFICERS

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16. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 16.1 Projects listed in the Priorities for the District 2013/14 available on the Council's website. This does not include key projects that have been initiated since the document was approved.
<http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/nhdcprioritiesforthedistrict2013-14.pdf>
- 16.2 Key actions recorded on Covalent, the Council's Performance & Risk software.