

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

ROYSTON AND DISTRICT COMMITTEE

**(Royston and Ermine Ward – Parishes of Barkway, Barley, Kelshall, Nuthampstead,
Reed and Therfield)**

**Meeting held at Main Hall, Icknield Walk First School, Poplar Drive, Royston
on 28 November 2007 at 7.30p.m.**

MINUTES

PRESENT: *Councillors: Mrs F.R. Hill (Chairman), H.M. Marshall (Vice-Chairman),
Mrs Liz Beardwell, P.C.W. Burt and A.F. Hunter.*

IN ATTENDANCE: *Barrie Jones – Head of Financial Services
Louise Symes – Planning Projects Manager
Simon Young – Transport Policy Officer
Steve Geach – Parks and Countryside Development Manager)
Alan Fleck - Community Development Officer
Susanne Gow – Committee and Member Services Officer*

ALSO PRESENT: *Royston Town Councillor Robert Smith
Tessa O'Neill – Building Design Partnerships
Martin Hempell - MVA Transport Consultancy*

5 members of the public.

52. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

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

53. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs R. Inwood and F.J. Smith.

54. MINUTES – 26 September 2007

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Royston and District Committee Meeting held on 26 September 2007, be approved as a true record of the proceedings, and be signed by the Chairman.

55. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman announced that under this heading, letters she had received from Royston Town Council concerning the weight limit on Melbourn Street near Royston Cave, lack of street lighting on Angel Pavement, and highways issues, would be discussed as the final item on the Agenda after Item 13.

After some discussion it was agreed that the Community Development Officer would investigate the issues and bring the matters back to the Royston and District Committee.

56. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman, Cllr Mrs F. Hill and Cllr P. Burt declared an interest in the grant application from the Royston Town Twinning Association, as they are both members of the organisation. They reserved the right to remain in the room and to vote when this item was brought before the Committee.

57. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No items were presented for consideration by the Committee under Public Participation.

58. ROYSTON TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY

The Planning Projects Manager introduced the representative from planning consultants Building Design Partnership (BDP), who would present to the Committee the Royston Town Centre Strategy Draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and associated documents, namely a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the draft SPD for public consultation.

The purpose of this presentation was to give an overview of the draft Strategy and supporting plans, and to seek Members' agreement to the details for public consultation, as set out in Section 5 of the report issued to Members with the Agenda of the Committee Meeting on 28 November 2007. It was hoped that the public consultation period would begin on 11 January and run until 22 February 2008.

The representative from BDP stated that the SPD would provide guidance on how development proposals should be carried out in Royston Town Centre, and would also form a creative vision for its future. The SA would extend the concept of the SEA to include economic and social concerns, and both of them would provide a framework for appraisal in which to assess the policies displayed in the document, to ensure that they are environmentally, economically and socially sustainable. The Committee were informed that the period covered by the SPD would be from its adoption in 2008 until 2021.

The Committee discussed the points put forward in the presentation, including the proposed opportunity sites for development or enhancement. The proposal in the Draft Strategy to leave the Warren Long Stay car park as it is, with no change of use, was discussed. The opinion of the Committee was that this space could be used for residential development, incorporating underground car parking that would serve the town centre.

The Royston Cross opportunity site was also discussed, and the suggestion of erecting a high quality building in context with its surroundings was also considered. It was stressed that any development or enhancement of the site should not impact on the Royston Cave.

The Committee agreed with the observation that there are empty retail outlets at Angel Pavement, and suggested that it would make sense to negotiate with landlords and owners now, to be proactive in increasing the vitality of Royston Town Centre. The plan was for this area to be for redevelopment to increase the type and size of retail floor space with quality shops and residential use above at upper levels, thereby improving the link between the High Street and Market Place.

The Planning Projects Manager revealed that following a commercial study undertaken by consultants DTZ, there has been some interest from a list of High Street retailers in opening outlets in Royston. The concept of providing a hierarchy of linked public spaces through the town centre, with the possible enhancement of Fish Hill Square as a public space, was supported. Concern was expressed, however, at the possibility of reducing car parking as part of the development of the Somerfield opportunity site.

The representative from BDP stated that the overall role envisaged for Royston was of a historic market town with great charm and character, but also with quality shops, cafés and restaurants, and all the facilities necessary for residents of the town and visitors from the surrounding villages and elsewhere. The Planning Projects Manager stressed that it was vital that the strategy for Royston was looked at long-term, with an agreed view of how it would be in 10 to 15 years' time, tempting though it was to concentrate on short-term changes which may solve current problems such as short-term parking. The proposed short, medium and long term measures were discussed, and in addition to giving consideration to short term parking measures, Members also wished to see in the short term, discussions being promoted with the owners of Angel Pavement and further consideration being given to the opportunity of enhancing Fish Hill Square as a public space.

The Committee agreed with the recommendation that the Civic Centre site was to be redeveloped, with the car parking being relocated and quality civic and Town Hall buildings, possibly an entertainment/cultural centre, and with residential buildings also envisaged in this location. This would need to be negotiated with the local Primary Care Trust, Royston Town Council and the Police, who all had an interest in the area. The Members agreed that the Draft Strategy, including the opportunity sites, should be considered as part of the public consultation programme, together with the option of including residential development at the Warren Car Park, and a quality building at the Royston Cross. The positive attributes of Royston as promoted in the Draft Strategy were to be highlighted as part of the public consultation process.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Royston and District Committee agreed with the proposal to issue the Royston Town Centre Strategy Draft Supplementary Planning Document as set out in Appendices 1 and 2 of the report, and the associated Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment document;
- 2) That the additional comments and feedback to the Royston Town Centre Strategy Draft Supplementary Planning Document be noted;
- 3) That the problems outlined should be addressed as soon as possible and that the parking issues raised should be included in the Strategy Draft Supplementary Planning Document;
- 4) That the public consultation process for the Draft Supplementary Planning Document for the Royston Town Centre Strategy, as set out in Section 5 of the report and subject to additional comments and feedback be agreed.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET: That the Draft Supplementary Planning Document for the Royston Town Centre Strategy as set out in Appendices 1 and 2 of the report (including additional comments and feedback), and the associated Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment document, be issued for public consultation.

REASON FOR DECISIONS:

To enable the Council to produce a Strategy that provides an overall framework for guiding development and enhancement opportunities within the town centre over the next 10 to 15 years, and in doing so, contributes towards achieving the Council's strategic objectives.

59. ROYSTON PARKING STRATEGY

The Transport Policy Officer introduced Martin Hempell from MVA Transport Consultancy, who presented the concluding report for the Royston Parking Strategy, for the Members views and agreement that it could be issued as a background paper to inform the Town Centre Strategy.

Martin Hempell went through the report outlining the Royston Parking Strategy, and he and the Transport Policy Officer then responded to questions from the Committee.

It was confirmed that work on the lengthening of the area of parking restrictions in both Newmarket Road and King James Way in an effort to increase road safety was currently in progress, and that the loading bays in the High Street were in the process of being converted into short-term limited waiting parking.

A local resident had made the point that he considered parking charges in Royston to be reasonable, but that some sort of time restriction was needed, as he knew of some cars being parked in a space from 8am to 7.30pm for £2.50, which was taking advantage of the long-term "all-day" parking charge.

However, the Members agreed that a trial period of low parking charges would bring people into Royston, and they could then see the effect of tickets sold and footfall, indicating whether or not to consider adoption of this policy. Discussion then ensued on which car park would be the best choice for this trial. The PPM reminded the Committee that it was vital to keep a balance between short-term and long-term goals, and that it took time to implement changes and to get people used to them. Flexibility was essential to the changing of strategy, and that it was important not to be too prescriptive.

Several Members confirmed that they were unable to support the Royston Parking Strategy until the matter of cheaper car parking charges had been addressed. The Transport Policy Officer stated that this could be dealt with under the new Urban Transport Plan, due to be implemented in 2008.

The Chairman thanked Martin Hempell for his report, which would be considered and revisited at the next Royston and district Committee Meeting on Wednesday 30 January 2008.

RESOLVED:

- 1) The Parking Strategy was presented, but is not currently supported by the Royston and District Committee. It was to be brought back to the next meeting with a view to it being used to inform the Town Centre Strategy consultation and proposals to improve parking facilities at Royston Station;
- 2) That officers investigate the feasibility of adjusting the parking machines so that a trial could be carried out with a different rate of car parking tickets for a set period, to determine the number of tickets sold, and see whether there is an increase in the use of the car park chosen for the trial. The object is to try and encourage shoppers back into the town and to increase the vitality of the Town Centre. The Committee did not agree with the principle of discouraging and reducing town centre parking;

[Note: Resolution 2 above is a matter which is outside of the Council's agreed Budget Framework. Paragraph 3.1 of the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules state that Area Committees can only take decisions which are in line with the Budget and Policy Framework and that a decision which is not in line can only be taken by Full Council. The Area Committee need to recommend this proposal for approval to Full Council.]

- 3) That the comments made by the Committee regarding car parking in Royston be included in the Royston Car Parking Strategy.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To allow the Royston and District Committee to consider the Parking Strategy ahead of it being issued for both the Town Centre Strategy consultation and work to progress additional parking at Royston Station.

60. NHDC TREE STRATEGY

The Parks and Countryside Development Manager (PCDM) submitted a report from the Head of Leisure and Environmental Services on a Draft Tree Strategy for the Royston and District Committee to examine, before making known their views on its adoption. It was suggested that this strategy would ensure the future maintenance of the tree stock owned or managed by North Hertfordshire District Council.

The aims of the Strategy were given as:

- a) Provide a basis to perpetuate the character of towns and other areas and provide for a continuity of the local treescape by establishing a tree population with a balanced age structure and diverse species mix.
- b) Allow the identification, quantification and evaluation of the Council's trees resource.
- c) Enable the preparation and execution of maintenance regimes and the prioritising and programming of a periodic maintenance or conservation works appropriate to the nature of each site. The Council's legal obligations would also be met more effectively, as would resistance to claims for damage or negligence.
- d) Improve the service to the general public. By increasing proactive maintenance and prudent replacement, trees would cause less danger, damage and nuisance thus reducing complaints, claims for damage and emergency situations.
- e) Enable the true cost of maintaining the Council's tree stock in a responsible manner to be established and allow realistic annual estimates to be compiled. Initial costs could increase significantly, but in the longer term as the health and condition of the tree stock improves, subsequent maintenance costs should reduce.

- f) Make the general public aware of the Strategy by appropriate publicity, thereby projecting the Council as an environmentally responsible body. Generally encourage and educate people not only to appreciate trees but also understand the reasons and need for tree renewal.
- g) Establish a more positive form of tree management which would allow both Council Members and its officers to deal with representations from the public, which may conflict with the views of others, in a firm, fair and more orderly manner.

The Members made comments such as trees blocking daylight should be trimmed, and asked whether healthy trees are felled. Mention was made of the large horse chestnut trees in Norton Way South and one Member asked the PCDM what the maintenance budget was for trees in North Hertfordshire. He was informed that North Herts District Council (NHDC) contribute £27,000 and Hertfordshire County Council contribute £10,000 to the maintenance budget. Discussion ensued, as it was revealed that 10% of the trees belong to NHDC and 90% to Herts County Council. Therefore it made sense for Herts County Council to make a larger financial contribution to maintain its trees, or there was a risk that all trees will be returned to the County to maintain. A Member of the Committee suggested that as part of the maintenance process, the level at which tree branches and bushes should be cut back must be raised, to take into account people with limited or no sight.

The Committee agreed that it was very worthwhile having a District Tree Strategy and unanimously endorsed it.

RESOLVED: To recommend to Cabinet that the adoption of the Tree Strategy be approved.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

To provide sustainable working practices to best meet customer expectations for the maintenance and development of trees under the Council's ownership and management.

61. SERVICE AND FINANCIAL PLANNING 2008-2013 – EFFICIENCIES AND INVESTMENTS 2008-2009

The Head of Financial Services gave a brief introduction to the report that of the Strategic Director of Finance and Regulatory Services which he had submitted to the Royston and District Committee. After taking account of the Members' comments, he planned to convey these to Cabinet on 18 December 2007.

After examining and discussing the Appendices to the Report, the Committee made the following comments:

- a) They were unable to support Ref. No SG10 – deletion of Principal Conservation Officer post;
- b) They could not support Ref No SG17 – deletion of the Handyperson/Security Scheme;
- c) The Committee requested clarification Ref No SG 26 – reduction of parish Challenge Fund and Parish Enhancement and Cleansing Fund and Parish Playground Funds. An explanation regarding the current state of bids was given by the Head of Financial Services, which was accepted by the Committee;
- d) They could not support Ref No SG28 – reduction of all Area Committee Grants by 10%. They asked for, and were given clarification that part of the Area Committee budget could be carried forward. But to strict guidelines;
- e) Reference item CG8 – two new CCTV cameras, fixing poles and fibre optic links in the Royston Station area – one Committee Member remarked that there is already one there. However, clarification was given that the existing CCTV camera was focused on the road outside the station, not the station car park. CG8 will be for the station area, and will be linked to the NHDC CCTV system.

RESOLVED: That the views of the Royston and District Committee be noted.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

- 1) To ensure that all Members are consulted on the proposed savings and growth bids and afforded the opportunity to comment before Cabinet sets the draft budget on 18 December 2007;
- 2) To ensure that Council is able to adjust its base expenditure downwards to narrow the gap between the 2008/09 District Requirement figure, as adjusted for anticipated capping limits, and the service spending requirements.

62. ROYSTON BUS SERVICES

The Transport Policy Officer (TPO) introduced the report of the Head of Planning and Building Control, regarding the latest situation regarding Royston's town bus services, and the efforts being made to agree future provision of bus services with Hertfordshire County Council.

The Committee were informed by the TPO that the bus operator considered that the fares on the 17 bus route were low, and that more revenue may be generated by raising fares, while also trying to save the route.

Discussion ensued on the financial contributions currently made by North Hertfordshire District Council and the Royston and District Committee to budgets for transport in Royston.

The TPO reminded Members that the reason that the subsidy had been withdrawn was that NHDC's contribution had risen from just over £300,000 in 2005/06 to £854,00 for the current year.

The Committee requested that the TPO obtained more details for a solution to the problem, and that he came back to a future meeting of the Royston and District Committee with his findings.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, thanked the Transport Policy Officer for the work and time he has dedicated to trying to solve the problem of reduced bus provision in Royston.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Royston and District Committee invite Hertfordshire County Council to discuss how best to provide Royston's bus services, with a specific view to considering all resources available, need for timetabled service, frequency and routing of such a service, and potential for better integration with community transport;
- 2) That the Committee consider the use of a discretionary budget contribution towards relocating bus stops following recent service changes;

REASON FOR DECISION:

To use the next best opportunity to influence contract bus service provision in Royston and provide small scale assistance to residents who now have to walk further to reach a bus stop.

63. CHAMPION NEWS

The Royston Community Development Officer (CDO) provided a review of his activities since the last meeting of the Royston and District Committee, held on 26 September 2007.

This covered items listed in the report as follows:

- a) The visit to North Hertfordshire District of the Countess of Verulam, the current Lord Lieutenant of Hertfordshire;
- b) The resounding success of the Council's second Youth Question Time in Royston, involving young people from Meridian School in Royston and Priory School and Hitchin Boys' School in Hitchin;
- c) This was followed by an extremely positive meeting with Royston Town Councillors regarding the formation of a Royston Youth Council;

- d) The meeting with the Police and other agencies to consider various ways to implement youth provision on Fish Hill and in Priory Memorial Gardens, and further interaction to consider costings and sources of funding. It was suggested that a shelter of some sort be erected to give the young people of Royston a place to meet in the evenings. Funding is being sought for a), b) and c) above;
- e) The administrative assistance afforded by the CDO to the Baldock Town Partnership;
- f) The efforts being made by NHDC to resolve the safety problem caused by the broken wall in the Somerfield car park;
- g) Discussions on future developments at the Coombes Community Centre;
- h) Assistance with Royston Farmers' Market, the Royston Sustainable Community Strategy event and repair of a street lamp in a play area;
- i) Seeking a costed outline of the phases for provision of a No Right Turn traffic order at Garden Walk onto the A10, to obtain an overview;
- j) Funding provided to Hertfordshire Highways for a Vehicle Activate speed sign in London Road;
- k) Photographs taken of defective pavement surfaces in various parts of Royston in order to forward these to Hertfordshire Highways for comment and rectification.

After some discussion on items b), d) and k) above, the Royston and District Committee requested further information to be brought back to a future Committee Meeting on all items except Item 2 under d) above in the Champion News Report – installation of fencing around the bandstand in Priory Memorial Gardens, with gates to permit occasional use.

It is hoped that there will be a future presentation on the relevant traffic problems in Royston from Hertfordshire Highways.

The Transport Policy Officer had prepared a Members' Information Note (MIN) regarding Royston Railway Crossing, and distributed it to the Royston and District Committee and officers present at the meeting. He stated that he was willing to answer any questions arising from the MIN, but none were forthcoming as it was self-explanatory.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee endorsed the actions taken by the Community Development Officer to promote greater community capacity and well-being and thanked him for his work.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To keep Members of the Royston and District Committee apprised of the work of the Community Development Officer and the latest developments in community activities in the Royston and District area.

64. ROYSTON AND DISTRICT COMMITTEE AND AREA VISIONING BUDGET 2007/2008

The Community Development Officer (CDO) took the Committee through the Royston and District Budget Statement for 2007/2008, and advised the Committee that there were four grant applications for determination.

Members were requested to note the information in Appendix A, which related to Area Committee Budget balances for the Financial Year 2007/08, the pre-allocations and the balances allocated to Visioning Budgets available to respective wards within the Royston and District area.

The Committee considered grant applications from four organisations, and then three prospective ways in which to reallocate the outstanding sum of £1,025, remaining after the works on the recycling bins on the Tesco site had been completed.

RESOLVED: That the current expenditure and balance of the Area Committee Development Budgets be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To allow the Royston and District Committee to continue with its support to local voluntary and community organisations and to further the aims and strategic priorities of North Herts District Council.

65. GRANT APPLICATION – HOME-START ROYSTON AND SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE

The Royston and District Committee considered the application from Home-Start Royston and South Cambridgeshire for funds to run a Family Group Volunteers course. The Members fully supported this grant application.

RESOLVED: That Home-Start Royston and South Cambridgeshire be awarded the maximum amount of £750 to provide a course to give new and existing volunteers additional support and training, particularly around safeguarding children in the context of anti-social issues and domestic violence.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To allow the Royston and District Committee to continue with its support to local voluntary and community organisations and events, and to further the aims and strategic priorities of North Herts District Council.

66. GRANT APPLICATION – ROYSTON AND DISTRICT TOWN TWINNING ASSOCIATION

Royston Town Twinning Association had submitted a grant application requesting £250 towards the sum required to fund visits from their twinning towns of Grossalmerode in Germany and La Loupe in France during 2007. However, they had already received an annual grant of £233, therefore the amount required was only £17.

The Members agreed to support this grant application despite the visits already having taken place.

RESOLVED: That the Royston Town Twinning Association be awarded the sum of £17 towards costs incurred during the visits of twinning towns of Grossalmerode in Germany and La Loupe in France.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To allow the Royston and District Committee to continue with its support to the local residents of Royston and the local community through its efforts to maintain the efficiency and regularity of local transport.

67. GRANT APPLICATION – NHDC INTERNAL BUDGETARY SUPPORT (POLISH TRANSLATION)

The CDO explained to the Committee that due to the number of Polish people working in Royston, there was a need for a translation service so that they could access information on revenues, benefits and other official literature. The sum of £150 was required to fund the start-up of a Polish Residents' Association, which could then apply to North Herts District Council for grants to help with translation issues.

RESOLVED: That the sum of £150 be awarded for the start-up of a Polish Residents' Association, leading to assistance for local Polish residents with translation of official literature and information on benefits and revenues.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To allow the Royston and District Committee to continue with its support to the local residents of Royston and the local community through its efforts to maintain the efficiency and regularity of local transport.

68. GRANT APPLICATION – ROYSTON TOWN CENTRE FORUM

A secure container is required to house the weights used to secure the market stalls used during the Farmers' Market and the Charter Market. This container will be sited at a more convenient location than at present, and the sum of £433 is requested by the Royston Town Centre Forum (RTCF) for the container. The RTCF will fund additional weights from the remaining balance of monies they have generated through the hiring of three commercial stalls during the summer.

RESOLVED: That the sum of £433 be awarded to the Royston Town Centre Forum to fund a secure container in which to keep the weights used to secure the stalls used during the Royston Farmers' Market and the Charter market.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To allow the Royston and District Committee to continue with its support to the local residents of Royston and the local community through its efforts to maintain the efficiency and regularity of local transport.

69. REVIEW OF MEMBERS' SURGERIES IN ROYSTON

The Community Development Officer submitted a report for the Members' information, reviewing the success of the Royston Members' Surgeries over the period from September 2006 to October 2007.

The review covered advertising for the surgeries, public attendance, a detailed analysis, actions and feedback.

The conclusion was that advertising in the local newspaper had a direct bearing on the number of people who attend; that although the number of surgeries had been halved, the number of attendees had risen.

The Committee agreed that the open air surgery in August had been a great success, and made the suggestion that there should be more of these, as it was thought that this would attract more people to attend.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Royston Surgeries be continued;
- 2) That further open-air Surgeries be conducted.

REASON FOR DECISIONS:

The efficient use of resources in communicating with the public.

The Chairman reminded the Committee that the next Royston and District Community Surgery will be held on Saturday 1 December from 10.30am to 12.00 noon at Royston Town Hall. Councillors F.J. Smith and R. Inwood were due to be in attendance, but as Councillor Smith was unable to attend due to his wife's operation, and Councillor Inwood's absence from the Committee Meeting, Councillors E. Beardwell and H.M. Marshall volunteered to attend the surgery in place of their colleagues.

The Community Development Officer informed the Committee that he would be unable to attend the Surgery as he would be in hospital at the time. However, Nigel Schofield from the Committee and Member Services office kindly volunteered to step in and service the Royston Members' Surgery on 1 December 2007.

The meeting closed at 10.40 p.m.

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Chairman