

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

**SOUTHERN RURAL COMMITTEE
(Cadwell, Chesfield, Codicote, Hitchwood, Offa & Hoo, Kimpton
and Knebworth Wards)**

**Minutes of the meeting held at the Council Offices, Letchworth Garden City on
Thursday, 22 January 2009 at 7.30 p.m.**

MINUTES

PRESENT: Councillors D.J. Barnard (Chairman), Tom Brindley (Vice-Chairman), John Bishop, Tricia Gibbs, Sal Jarvis and C. P. A. Strong.

IN ATTENDANCE: Patrick Candler (Head of Community Development and Cultural Services), Lynne Saville (Head of Strategy and Support Services, Mary Caldwell (Planning Control & Conservation Manager), Andrew Mills (Grounds Service Manager), Ashley Hawkins (Communications Officer), Mark Simmons (Conservation Officer), Garry Gover (Community Development Officer), Hilary Dineen (Committee and Member Services Officer).

NB Councillor John Bishop arrived at 7.50pm

Three members of the public at commencement of meeting.

57. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Alan Bardett, Lee Downie, Jane Gray and David Miller.

58. MINUTES – 27 NOVEMBER 2008

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 November 2008 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

59. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was discussed.

60. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

- (1) The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting;
- (2) The Chairman reminded the Members that any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda, should be declared as either a prejudicial or personal interest and are required to notify the Chairman of the nature of any interest declared at the commencement of the relevant item on the agenda. Members declaring a prejudicial interest should leave the room and not seek to influence the decision during that particular item;
- (3) The Chairman advised that Items 8 - Old Knebworth Conservation Area Review and 10 – Youth Provision across the Southern Rural Area would be taken immediately after Public Participation, the rest of the agenda items would follow;
- (4) The Chairman proposed and it was agreed to offer congratulations and best wishes to Patrick Candler (Head of Community Development and Cultural Services) on his appointment as Director of Cultural Services at Nottinghamshire County Council and a vote of thanks for his support to the Southern Rural Committee and North Herts during his time at NHDC.

61. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – KNEBworth ESTATES

The Hon. Henry Lytton Cobbold thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee regarding the Old Knebworth Conservation Area Review. He informed the Committee that a pack of letters supporting Knebworth Estates proposed boundary had been tabled for Members to read; that the boundary placement was of great importance to the business of Knebworth Estates and that Cabinet had not voted in support of Officer recommendations at the meeting held on 8 April 2008. He drew attention to the tabled pack of letters stating that English Heritage had stated that this level of regulation was not appropriate as the estate was already covered by Green Belt, Listed Building and Country Wildlife Park regulations; that the business carried out by Knebworth Estates required support and not further regulation and extra expense and that he was seeking support for Option 3 as marked on the maps enclosed with the Officers report.

The Chairman thanked the Hon. Henry Lytton Cobbold for his presentation.

RESOLVED: That Hon. Henry Lytton Cobbold be thanked for his informative presentation.

62. HIGHWAY ISSUES – KNEBworth PARISH COUNCIL

The Chairman advised the Committee that Knebworth Parish Council had agreed to fund £500 toward lighting and some resurfacing at Pondcroft Road to London Road Knebworth which amounted to 50 percent of the amount requested for this project.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Knebworth Ward Members be asked if they would wish to fund the additional £500 required for lighting and some resurfacing to Pondcroft Road to London Road, Knebworth;
- (2) That this Committee reconsider the funding of this project at the next meeting of the Committee due to be held on 12 March 2009.

REASON FOR DECISION: To consider funding of actions that will increase road safety in the Knebworth area.

63. HIGHWAY ISSUES – LUTON ROAD, COCKERNHOE.

The Chairman advised the Committee that he had met Officers from Hertfordshire Highways at the site and it was clear that the road was very narrow and the verges were being used as passing places for buses and the proposed work would solve the issues along this stretch of road. He informed the Committee that Hertfordshire Highways had provided an estimate of £15000 for verge protection work, signage and bollards required at Luton Road, Cockernhoe.

RECOMMENDED TO NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE HIGHWAYS PARTNERSHIP – JOINT MEMBER PANEL:

- (1) That a grant of £6000 be awarded as matched funding to undertake verge surfacing, closure/signage/diversion and 4 wooden bollards at Luton Road, Cockernhoe on provision that Offley Parish Council agree funding in the amount of £1500;
- (2) That Offley Parish Council be requested to fund £1500 towards joint matched funding to undertake the work as detailed in resolution (1) at Luton Road, Cockernhoe.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To support actions that will improve road safety in the Cockernhoe area.

64. DEVELOPMENT OF A RURAL RESOURCE CENTRE AT GREAT ASHBY

The Grounds Service Manager (GSM) presented the report of the Head of Leisure and Environmental Services. He advised the Committee that the work undertaken so far was a feasibility study to consider the options available and referred to section 4 of the report which detailed the feasibility criteria. He informed the Committee that discussions with the Residents Association had raised issues regarding community use of any proposed building; that the Countryside Management Service (CMS) had undertaken much work in the Great Ashby Park and that S106 agreements regarding this had a further 4 years after which no funding would be available for maintenance of the park; that the final conclusions of the study would be presented to Cabinet in March 2009; that the work undertaken so far focused on the potential of a building rather than use of any building provided; that the aim would be to encompass local residents opinions and that the proposed building was estimated to cost £1.2 million, which would have to be raised by matched funding.

Members debated the report including that the proposed design of the building was exiting; that the S106 monies allocated to this project were intended for community and as such should the proposed building be available to the community; that CMS should be asked for a greater contribution towards costs as they would gain the most benefit from the building and that there was no provision of public conveniences in the building, or elsewhere in the park;

The GSM informed the Committee that it was intended to consult with local residents and groups; that the provision of public conveniences would be considered and that concerns regarding funding levels and benefits to CMS will be taken up.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the content of the ongoing feasibility study regarding a Rural Resource Centre at Great Ashby be noted;
- (2) That consultation take place within the local community to include local residents and groups and the Countryside Management Service in order to develop community benefit;
- (3) That the results of the community consultation be reported to this Committee prior to submission to Cabinet.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To provide sustainable working practices to best meet the needs of the local community and the Countryside Management Service throughout the development of an appropriate facility within the Great Ashby District Park and ensure the valuable resource of the Great Ashby District Park is appropriately managed in the future.

65. OLD KNEBWORTH CONSERVATION AREA REVIEW

Prior to the commencement of the item Councillors C. P. A. Strong and D. J. Barnard declared a personal interest that as previous Chairmen of NHDC they were Council nominees to the Knebworth Preservation Trust.

The Conservation Officer (CO) presented the report of the Head of Planning and Building Control. He advised that Recommendation 10.1 (ii) of the report should read "That Southern Rural Committee supports the Old Knebworth Conservation Area appraisal and revised map as considered at paragraphs 5.1 to 5.25 of the report taken to Southern Rural Committee on 20 February 2008 and supported by Southern Rural Committee on 3 April 2008."

The CO outlined that it was wholly appropriate to include Area A within the Conservation Area boundary; that there was unequivocal support from English Heritage for the proposed Option 4; that assessment of commercial impact was not part of the Conservation Area considerations, although these had been noted and that the House, Church, Park and Gardens were inextricably linked with the Village.

Members debated the issues in depth including disappointment that an alternative proposal had not been brought to the Committee for consideration following referral back to this Committee from Cabinet; that Southern Rural had previously recommended Option 4; whether Knebworth Estates would be subject to onerous financial burden as a result of Option 4 or not; concern that work to trees in the Park would involve onerous administration; concern as to whether NHDC would impose tree management plans if any plan from Knebworth Estates plan was viewed as unsatisfactory.

The CO advised that Officers had reconsidered the boundary of the proposed Conservation Area following the resolution from Cabinet, had revisited all of the evidence and advice given by independent professionals and investigated the options set out in the report but concluded that Option 4 was the only boundary which could be fully justified in conservation and planning terms. He advised that there would be no significant financial implication for Knebworth Estates as Officers would accept annual tree programmes that are already prepared as notice of works.

He also advised that when considering Area A Officers had followed English Heritage guidance which included the following:

- Location and Setting;
- General Character and plan form;
- Landscape Setting;
- Historic Development and Archaeology;
- Spatial Analysis;
- Key views and vistas;
- Activity and prevailing or former uses;
- The qualities of buildings including local details.

The Planning Control and Conservation Manager advised that NHDC did not require notice of work to dead, dying or dangerous trees within a Conservation Area and that any differences in views regarding any tree management plan would be negotiated. A tree preservation order may be considered appropriate in certain circumstances. The inclusion of the park in the Conservation Area would not restrict the erection of temporary structures for events. She recommended that the proposed boundary of Option 4 satisfied national guidance.

It was proposed and seconded that Officers recommendation of Option 4 be recommended to Cabinet, a vote was taken and was lost

Members debated the merits of other options and it was proposed and seconded that the Old Knebworth Conservation Area be as detailed in Option 3.

The Planning Control and Conservation Manager advised that planning and conservation justification must be given for any alternative boundary option considered by the Committee.

Members debated planning and conservation guidance available after which planning and conservation justification for this option was not forthcoming and the motion was withdrawn.

It was proposed and seconded that Option 1A (the existing conservation area) be retained.

RESOLVED: That the Old Knebworth Conservation Area be retained as marked Option1A

REASON FOR DECISION: that in the opinion of the Committee there was no justification to change the boundary previously designated.

66. KEYFINDINGS FROM THE NHDC 2008 DISTRICT WIDE SURVEY WITH PARTICULAR FOCUS ON RESPONSES FROM SOUTHERN RURAL RESIDENTS

The Consultation Officer presented the report of the Head of Strategy and Support Services. He advised that the survey was only one of the tools used to assess the attitudes of residents towards NHDC and referred the Committee to section 4 of the report which detailed the key findings. He informed the Committee that the residents from the Southern Rural area were generally more satisfied with services than the overall response and drew attention to the results regarding:

- Satisfaction with the local neighbourhood
- Satisfaction with the way in which the Council runs things overall
- Residents kept informed of services and benefits that the Council provides
- The Quality of Council services
- Receipt of Outlook through the door
- Waste and Collections Services
- Children's Play Areas
- Markets

He also drew attention to 4-5 areas where Southern Rural residents were less satisfied with services than the overall response, namely

- Street Cleaning
- Indoor Pools
- Outdoor Pools
- Public Halls
- Sports Centres

Members debated the report including that the questions should ensure that responses relate to services provided by NHDC and not those of other Authorities and concern at the level of dissatisfaction regarding public halls particular in light of the large amount of investments made in recent years from the Council's grant – aid funds of the Parish Amenity Capital Improvement Fund (PACIF) and Parish Challenge.

The Head of Strategy and Support Services informed the Committee that it was difficult to change the questions drastically as it then no longer be possible to compare results from survey to survey and that she would be addressing areas of dissatisfaction and to support this would be mapping needs and supply.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report regarding the District Wide Survey be noted;
- (2) That the Consultation Officer be requested to consider that future survey questions ensure that responses refer to services provided by NHDC and investigate the results pertaining to public halls.

67. YOUTH PROVISION ACROSS THE SOUTHERN RURAL AREA

The Head of Community Development and Cultural Services presented the report. He advised that the report set out the key issues regarding youth provision; that the Rural Strategy was being reviewed and that the strategic lead responsibility for the provision of Youth activities and services lay with the County Council, though the District Council had a duty to co-operate in such provision. responsibility for provision He drew attention to paragraph 4.4 of the report and advised that the details of the Youth Connexions "Youth Offer" were still awaited. The Head of Community Development and Cultural Services advised that MBA group who operated the Great Ashby Youth Club were unwilling to submit an application for funding support, and therefore would no longer receive, Authority funding.

Members debated the issues including the level of charges set by the County Council for use of school premises; the level of funding that the Committee has given for youth projects in the past and the levels of funding support was given to rural areas from the Youth Development Budget.

The Head of Community Development and Cultural Services informed the Committee that work was being undertaken with Partners to address issues such as charges; that £5000 was a reasonable amount which could be used as “pump priming” and that funding is available and allocated to rural areas.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the range of activities that have been achieved within the context of the Rural Strategy 2005 – 10 be noted;
- (2) That the Youth Issues Group of the District Children’s Partnership be requested to develop a more strategic and proactive approach to the provision of youth activities;
- (3) That a sum of £5000 be allocated from the 2008/09 Base Budget for the provision of youth activities in the Southern Rural Area to be carried forward for the financial year 2009 – 2010;
- (4) That Officers be requested to seek matched funding for the direct provision of youth activities from other partners;
- (5) That the Committee’s budget be further reviewed at the next meeting on 12 March 2009 for consideration of awarding any unallocated funds to support youth provision throughout the Southern Rural area.

68. CHAMPION NEWS AND COMMUNITY REPORT

The Community Development Officer updated the Committee on activities since the last meeting of the Southern Rural Area Committee held on 27 November 2008. Particular attention was drawn to the following:

- Applications received by the Parish Challenge Panel – award decisions to be announced by 31 January 2009;
- Codicote First Aid Group – an application for grant funding will be submitted to the Committee on 12 March 2009;
- Village of the Year Award – Baldock Area Committee have requested further information and Royston Committee have supported the initiative with grant funding;
- Hertfordshire Community Meals – seeking volunteers who are able to offer support during lunchtimes on a monthly or weekly basis. This request should be forwarded to all Parish and Town Councils and Parish Meetings for wider community distribution.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the information provided by the Community Development Officer on activities since the last meeting of the Southern Rural Committee held on 27 November 2008 be noted.
- (2) That the Head of Policy, Partnerships and Performance be requested to provide information in advance of the 2009 Rural Conference to avoid the delays in previous years.

69. ANNUAL GRANTS, DEVELOPMENT, DISCRETIONARY AND VISIONING BUDGETS 2007-2008

The Community Development Officer presented the report to the Committee, which set out the current expenditure and balances of the Area Committee delegated budgets. The Community Development Officer also brought to the Committee's attention details of the recent requests received for grant funding.

RESOLVED: That the budgetary expenditure, balances and carry forward items from the Ward Development Budgets and allocated Visioning budgets as set out at Appendix 3 be noted.

70. GRANT REQUEST – OFFLEY AND COCKERNHOE PARISH COUNCIL

RESOLVED: That, providing all conditions as set out in the grant approval form are met, a grant of £500 be awarded to Offley and Cockernhoe Parish Council as support funding to purchase and install 2 stainless steel bollards and 1 black bollard to prevent unauthorised access to a car park.

71. GRANT REQUEST – OFFLEY AND COCKERNHOE PARISH COUNCIL

RESOLVED: That a grant of £500 be awarded to Offley and Cockernhoe Parish Council as support funding to purchase and install an additional notice board in the village of Tea Green

72. GRANT REQUEST – VILLAGE OF THE YEAR NORTH AWARD

The Community Development Officer outlined the principals of the proposed Village of the Year North Award together with the estimated costings.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That a grant of £1000 be awarded towards support funding for the Village of the Year North Award 2009;
- (2) That a grant of £300 per year for the years 2010 and 2011 be awarded in principal towards support funding for the Village of the Year North Award 2010 and 2011;
- (3) That the NHDC Communications Manager and the CPRE Village of the Year North Administrator be requested to ensure that a comprehensive publicity campaign is made in the local media to promote the Village of the Year North Award.

73. REALLOCATION OF AND OUTSTANDING BUDGETS

The Community Development Officer drew Members attention to the list of budget items that had been allocated over 2 years previously and advised that Members should review each item and allocate any underspend. He also advised that Committee and Ward budgets for 2008/9 should be allocated before the end of this financial year at 31 March 2009.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That £47 marked as Southern Rural Community Events under the Revenue Visioning budget be allocated to Youth Provision;
- (2) That £500 marked as Southern Rural Youth Events under the Revenue Visioning budget be reallocated to Youth Provision;
- (3) That £990 marked as Southern Rural Village Halls under Revenue Visioning budget be reallocated to Village of the Year North Award;

- (4) That £2000 marked as Highways Project Codicote under Development budget be reallocated to Highways Project budget, subject to Hertfordshire Highways not submitting an invoice for the recently completed works;
- (5) That the Community Development Officer be requested to inform each Ward Member of all outstanding grant allocations which must be resolved before the end of the current financial year at 31 March 2009;
- (6) That the Community Development Officer and the Licensing and Enforcement Manager be requested to present an update report to the next meeting to be held on 12 March 2009 detailing the implementation of the two covert CCTV systems following funding of the equipment by Southern Rural, the successful detected offences and the value of fines and costs awarded to NHDC.

74 NEXT MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE – OPEN PUBLIC FORUM

The Chairman informed the Committee that an Open Public Forum would be held prior to the next meeting of the Southern Rural Committee due to be held on 12 March 2009, the venue for this meeting would be advised as soon as possible

The meeting closed at 10.15 p.m.

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Chairman