

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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

**Minutes of the meeting held at Cassel Memorial Hall, Lilley
on Thursday, 12 March 2009 at 7.30 p.m.**

MINUTES

PRESENT: Councillors D.J. Barnard (Chairman), Tom Brindley (Vice-Chairman), Alan Bardett, John Bishop, Tricia Gibbs, Jane Gray, David Miller and C. P. A. Strong.

NB: Councillor David Miller left the meeting at 9.50 pm

IN ATTENDANCE: Jim Brown (Policy Manager),
Garry Gover (Community Development Officer)
Hilary Dineen (Committee and Member Services Officer).

4 members of the public at commencement of meeting.

75. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Sal Jarvis.

76. MINUTES – 22 JANUARY 2009

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 January 2009 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

77. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman advised that, due to urgency and the timing of meetings, Councillor Gray would be introducing an item regarding St Martins Church car park under item 7 – Highways Issues (see Minute 94).

78. 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.

79. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT BY THE JUDICIARY

Nicholas Moss, a local Magistrate, thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee regarding community engagement by the judiciary. He informed the Committee that a new initiative had been introduced to promote public confidence in the justice system by use of public engagement; that the justice system was keen to improve engagement and would like to use the Area Committee Public Forum to do this; that the aim was to explain how the justice system works, understand the concerns of the community regarding the system and emphasise that the sentencing regime was fair, taking account of the victims, community and offenders. He advised the Committee that Community Service, although seen by the Community as a 'soft' option, was effective when the offender recognises the effect that their offence has had on a victim or the community; that suitable projects that could be used for Community Service were being sought and that he was looking to encourage people to appear in court as witnesses and apply to become JPs.

Members asked several questions including how were fines used as a deterrent when an offender is unemployed; what were the powers available when people do not pay the fines set; that offenders could be asked to undertake many more tasks within the Community and what happens to the victim surcharge that was applied to offences.

Mr Moss informed Members that fines were intended to be commensurate with the person and therefore are set according to income; that 80 percent of fines are collected and although repayment instalments could be negotiated, non payment was a prisonable offence; that Community Service aims to make use of existing skills or educate the offender and that the victim surcharge went towards the support of victims.

Members recommended that Mr Moss consider attending the Rural Conference, which would be attended by Parish Councils and may offer further opportunities for public engagement as well as attending a future Southern Rural Public Forum.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Committee and Members Services Officer be requested to invite Mr Moss to attend the next suitable Southern Rural Public Forum;
- (2) That the Chairman request that the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement and Rural Affairs invite Mr Moss to the Rural Conference.

The Chairman thanked Mr Moss for his informative presentation.

80. ANNUAL GRANTS, DEVELOPMENT, DISCRETIONARY AND VISIONING BUDGETS

The Community Development Officer presented the report of the Acting Head of Community Development and Cultural Services and informed the Committee that the remaining sum available for development grant funding in the year 2008 -2009 was £2,770 and reminded Members that, if they were so minded, grants could be agreed in principal from the 2009 – 2010 budget. He also advised that £1,427 was unallocated in the 2008 – 2009 Highways Project Budget. Members were reminded that any Ward Member budgets not spent by 31 March 2009 would be transferred to the base budget.

Members debated whether granting in principal from next year's budget was a good idea; that groups should be encouraged to submit grant funding requests to the Committee at an earlier stage and that more detailed information was required for grant applications including balance sheets, other grant funding sources and previous grants funding agreed by this Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the budgetary expenditure, balances and carry forwards from the Ward Development Budgets and unallocated Visioning Budgets be noted;
- (2) That the Community Development Officer be requested to provide more details for future grant applications including balance sheets, other grant funding sources and previous grant funding agreed by this Committee.

81. GRANT APPLICATION - ICKLEFORD CRICKET CLUB

Members debated that sport in rural areas should be supported and that this ground provided many activities for young people

RESOLVED: That a grant of £1,250 be awarded to Ickleford Cricket Club from the 2008 – 2009 Discretionary Budget, as support funding towards refurbishment of outdoor nets.

82. GRANT APPLICATION – ICKLEFORD PRE-SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Members debated whether this pre-school received funding from other sources such as the Rands Trust and whether the large balance held by the organisation had been identified for expenditure.

RESOLVED: That a grant of £500 be awarded to Ickleford Pre-School Committee from the 2008 – 2009 Discretionary Budget, as support funding towards provision of library resources.

83. GRANT APPLICATION – GREAT ASHBY COMMUNITY CENTRE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

Members debated the application including concern that the event appears to be profit making and therefore could be self funding and therefore the grant could not be supported however, if an application for grant funding was presented in future, the Committee would require an oral presentation.

84. GRANT APPLICATION – CODICOTE HEART ACTION TEAM

Members debated the application including that the organiser had discussed the project at the Public Forum held in November 2008; that any grant should be for start up purposes; whether the project should be open to people from areas outside of Codicote and whether sufficient information was available to make a decision regarding grant funding.

Members sought clarification regarding the precise nature of the project

The Community Development Officer advised Members that the aim of the project was to provide resource packs; to facilitate training provided by a national organisation and to promote screening programmes and awareness.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That a decision regarding grant funding to the Codicote Heart Action Team be deferred pending further information in the form of a presentation to this Committee from the organisation;
- (2) That the Community Development Officer invite the Codicote Heart Action Team to make a presentation at the next meeting of the Committee, due to be held on 17 June 2009.

85. GRANT APPLICATION – LILLEY VILLAGE FETE COMMITTEE

Members were advised that the Lilley Village Fete due to be held in 2008 had been cancelled and the grant monies awarded had been repaid.

RESOLVED: That a grant of £579 to the Lilley Village Fete Committee be agreed in principal from the 2009 – 2010 Discretionary Budget as support funding towards the provision of a village fete in Lilley.

86. GRANT APPLICATION – KNEBWORTH FESTIVAL COMMITTEE

Members debated the application including whether the balance carried forward from last year's event should be used to make the event self sufficient and self funded and whether they received sufficient grant funding from other sources to enable the event to take place.

The Members were informed that the balance carried forward was entirely due to grant funding and that the event held last year actually made a loss of approximately £4000.

Members considered that they would provide grant funding for the event this year, but would not expect to receive applications for future events.

RESOLVED: That a grant of £1,000 to Knebworth Festival Committee be agreed in principal from the 2009 – 2010 Discretionary Budget as support funding towards the provision of a 2009 Festival in Knebworth.

87. GRANT APPLICATION – KNEBWORTH PARISH COUNCIL

Members debated the application including that Parish Councils have no limit on the precept that is set and that the Parish Council should be encouraged to use precept funding in future.

RESOLVED:

(1) That a grant of £500 be awarded to Knebworth Parish Council from the 2008 – 2009 Discretionary Budget as support funding towards the provision of new IT equipment;

(2) That the Community Development Officer be requested to remind Knebworth Parish Council that future purchases of this kind should be funded from Precept income.

88. GRANT APPLICATION – KNEBWORTH SCOUT AND GUIDE GROUP

Members agreed that this grant application would be considered in conjunction with the second grant application from the same organisation (see minute 89)

89. GRANT APPLICATION – KNEBWORTH SCOUT AND GUIDE GROUP

Members had previously agreed that the two applications for grant funding from this organisation would be considered together. They debated the applications including whether existing funds should be taken into account; that this was an active group providing activities for the youth of the area and whether such groups should be encouraged to plan for long term repair issues.

RESOLVED: That a grant of £520 be awarded to the Knebworth Scout and Guide Group from the 2008 – 2009 Discretionary Budget as support funding towards the cost of a replacement boiler.

90. GRANT APPLICATION – KIMPTON ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION

The Community Development Officer advised the Committee that a grant of £150 had been granted to Knebworth Allotment Association as support funding for start up costs of the association. This grant has been agreed through the 'fast track' system with the agreement of the Ward Councillor, Committee Chairman and Acting Head of Community Development and Cultural Services.

91. HIGHWAY ISSUES – KNEBWORTH PARISH COUNCIL

Councillor Tom Brindley informed the Committee that funding issues regarding resurfacing at Pondcroft Road to London Road Knebworth had been resolved by the North Hertfordshire Highways Partnership – Joint member Panel. .

92. HIGHWAY ISSUES – LUTON ROAD, COCKERNHOE.

Councillor Tom Brindley advised the Committee that funding for this project had been agreed at the North Hertfordshire Highways Partnership – Joint Member Panel meeting which was held on 26 January 2009 and that work had commenced today. It was noted that the project was jointly matched funded by £6,000 from this Committee's Highways Project Budget and £1,500 from Offley & Cockernhoe Parish Council.

93. HIGHWAY ISSUES – OLD KNEBORTH LANE, KNEBORTH

Councillor Tom Brindley advised the Committee that the North Hertfordshire Highways Partnership – Joint Member Panel had agreed that signage stating a 7.5 tonne weight limit be placed at the entrance to Old Knebworth Lane, Knebworth and that this had been placed on the provisional list of works for 2009 – 2010.

94. HIGHWAY ISSUES – ST MARTINS CHURCH CAR PARK, KNEBORTH

The Chairman had previously agreed to take this item as a matter of urgency due to the timing of Committee meetings.

Councillor Gray informed the Committee that the car park of St Martins Church, Knebworth had suffered severe damage due to the recent inclement weather and was now in danger of being closed. She advised that, although the car park was the property of the church, it was used as a public and school car park and therefore used by the wider community and that its closure would cause severe problems for traffic in the area. She informed the Committee that the Village Trust had granted £2000 towards repairs and requested that the Committee consider granting £1,427 from the Committee's Highways Project Budget toward this project.

Members debated the request including that Parish Challenge and PACIF funding had been awarded to similar projects in the past; whether other communities may request support for this type of project in the future and that any grant award should be dependent on public use of the car park continuing.

RESOLVED: That a grant of £1,427 be awarded to St Martins Church from the 2008 – 2009 Highways Project Budget towards the resurfacing of the church car park, on condition that the car park remains available for public use at all times.

95. UPDATE ON THE 2005 – 2010 RURAL STRATEGY

The Policy Manager presented the report of the Head of Policy, Partnerships and Performance. He informed the Committee that the Rural Strategy was agreed in 2005; a report on partnership working with Parish Councils had been presented to the Scrutiny Committee in March 2007; that PARC had suggested in January 2009 that this Committee be updated on the progress of the action plan. He also advised that the strategy covered a very wide range of topics and it had been difficult to obtain some information due to reorganisations of other agencies, such as the Primary Care Trust, since 2005.

Members debated the report including that the referral of the Strategy to this Committee was part of the proceedings which encompassed the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group on the subject; that not all Parish Councils were members of the Hertfordshire Association of Town and Parish Councils (HATPC), which could mean that non members are not consulted; that Ward Members could encourage Parish Council Membership of HATPC and that the Strategy should be included on the Agenda for the Rural Conference which is tentatively planned to take place on 25 June 2009.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the progress with the 2005 – 2010 Rural Strategy be noted;
- (2) That the intention to revise the Rural Strategy in 2010 be noted;
- (3) That the Southern Rural Committee declares support for Hertfordshire Association of Town and Parish Councils and encourages all Parish Councils within North Herts to join.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To ensure the Committee is updated on the 2005 – 2010 Rural Strategy.

96. CHAMPION NEWS AND COMMUNITY REPORT

The Community Development Officer presented the report of the Acting Head of Community Engagement and Cultural Services. He drew attention to the update on the implementation of covert CCTV statistics; offenders caught; effectiveness; feedback on the benefits of the system and press coverage.

Members expressed disappointment at the low number of offenders taken to court; the limited press coverage and that the courts had not fully covered the Council's costs when sentencing the offenders.

RESOLVED: That the information provided by the Community Development Officer on activities since the last meeting of the Southern Rural Committee held on 22 January 2009 be noted.

97. NEXT MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE

The next meeting of the Southern Rural Committee will be held on Wednesday 17 June 2009, the venue for this meeting to be advised as soon as possible.

The meeting closed at 9.55 p.m.

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Chairman