

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES

Meeting of the Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices,
Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City
on Thursday, 21st November, 2019 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Terry Tyler (Vice-Chairman), Ian Albert, Daniel Allen, David Barnard, Clare Billing, Judi Billing, John Bishop, Ruth Brown, Val Bryant, Paul Clark, Sam Collins, George Davies, Steve Deakin-Davies, Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, Morgan Derbyshire, Faye Frost, Gary Grindal, Simon Harwood, Terry Hone, Keith Hoskins, Mike Hughson, Tony Hunter, Steve Jarvis, David Levett, Ian Mantle, Gerald Morris, Michael Muir, Lisa Nash, Sue Ngwala, Helen Oliver, Sean Prendergast, Mike Rice, Adem Ruggiero-Cakir, Val Shanley, Carol Stanier, Martin Stears-Handscomb, Claire Strong, Kay Tart, Richard Thake, Tom Tyson and Michael Weeks.

IN ATTENDANCE: David Scholes (Chief Executive), Anthony Roche (Deputy Chief Executive), Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), Melanie Stimpson (Democratic Services Manager), Gavin Ramtohal (Legal Commercial Team Manager), Reuben Ayavoo (Policy and Community Engagement Manager) and Hilary Dineen (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager).

ALSO PRESENT: At the commencement of the meeting approximately 8 members of the public, including registered speakers.

43 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 34 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jean Green (Chairman of the Council) as she was attending a Civic Engagement.

Apologies for absence were also received from Councillors Kate Aspinwall, Jim McNally, Ian Moody and Sam North.

Councillor Kay Tart advised that she would arrive late for the meeting.

44 MINUTES - 12 SEPTEMBER 2019

Audio recording – 1 minute 18 seconds

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb, seconded by Councillor Paul Clark and

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 12 September 2019 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

45 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 1 minute 36 seconds

There was no other business notified.

46 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 1 minute 43 seconds

(1) Fire Announcement

The Vice-Chairman advised that no testing of the fire alarms was expected. If the alarm did sound those attending were to leave the building by the fire exits.

(2) Mobile Phones

The Vice-Chairman reminded those present to turn off mobile phones or mute the ring tone and other sounds.

(3) Climate Emergency

Members were reminded that this Council had declared a Climate Emergency. This was a serious decision and meant that, as this was an emergency, all of us, officers and Members had that in mind as we carried out our various roles and tasks for the benefit of our District.

(4) Audio Recording

The Vice-Chairman advised that, in accordance with Council policy this meeting was being audio recorded.

(5) Declarations of Interest

Members were reminded to make declarations of interest before an item, the detailed reminder about this and speaking rights was set out under item 3 on the agenda.

(6) Refreshments

The Vice-Chairman invited all Members to refreshments after the meeting in Committee Rooms 2/3.

(7) Comfort break

The Vice-Chairman advised that, if the meeting went on beyond 9pm, he would call a 5 minute comfort break. He reminded Members to remain in the room prior to this to ensure they could vote.

(8) Councillor Helen Oliver

The Vice-Chairman, on behalf of the Council, congratulated Councillor Helen Oliver on her recent marriage.

(9) Rules of Debate

The Vice-Chairman reminded Members that in accordance with the Constitution please could Members ensure that no speech exceeded five minutes without the consent of the Chairman.

(10) Business Rate Pooling Application – Use of Urgency in Relation to Call-In

Attention was drawn to the Information note which advised Council of the use of urgency provisions, which in accordance with the Constitution must be reported to the next meeting of the Council.

(11) Order of Business

The Vice-Chairman advised that he would be taking Item 8 – Notice of Motions immediately following Public Participation.

47 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - CITIZENS ADVICE NORTH HERTS

Audio recording – 5 minutes 22 seconds

Prior to the item be discussed Councillor Paul Clark declared a Declarable Interest in that he was a Member and for Chair of CABNH. As there was no decision required, he would remain in the room for the duration of the item.

Ms Rosie Waters, Citizens Advice North Herts, thanked the Vice-Chairman for the opportunity to address Council as follows:

- Funding from NHDC to CABNH was due to end in March 2020 and she was asking for this to be extended;
- NHDC funding covered core costs and had remained static for many years and actual costs had doubled, therefore was making a request for a £30,000 increase in year 1 and a multi-year agreement with annual increases from then on;
- Last year NHDC also funded a support worker for one year it was hoped that this funding would continue as it provided invaluable help for vulnerable people;
- The organisation needed to grow in order to meet unmet demand and help more local residents;
- Need for this service was increasing. In the first 6 months of this year there had been:
 - 895 increase in clients (34 percent)
 - 1,412 increase in advice issues (25 percent);
 - Over 1,000 more client activities.
- DWP had given funding for a Universal Credit service, however this only accounted for 157 people;
- On average 40 percent of clients could not get through on the phone lines
- This was a value for money organisation that helped the most vulnerable in society with 43 percent of clients having a disability or long term health issue;
- Last year volunteers gave £540,000 of donated hours;
- They were working on community funding, cutting costs, making efficiencies and applying for new projects.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Clare Billing;
- Councillor Terry Tyler.

In response to questions Ms Waters advised:

- There was a rise in Universal Credit enquiries and family/relationship issues;
- There was a small increase in immigration issues;
- They currently received £145,000 from NHDC and were requesting an additional £30,000, which would pay for extra supervision and a further £30,000 would maintain the support worker post.

The Vice-Chairman thanked Ms Waters for her presentation.

48 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - RIVER IVEL

Audio recording – 13 minutes 9 seconds

Ms Sharon Moat and Mr Richard Meredith-Hardy, RevIvel thanked the Vice-Chairman for the opportunity to address Council and gave a PowerPoint presentation regarding the River Ivel as follows:

- RevIvel was an organisation concerned about the upper River Ivel;
- There were 220 chalk streams in the world 85 percent of which were in England;
- Chalk streams were precious with their clear pure water and wonderful environment for wildlife;
- It took two months for rainfall to filter through the soil into the underground lake that sources the river;
- Abstraction was an abomination that severely affected the Ivel;
- The River had been dry for 15 months at Ivel Springs and there was no flow at Blackfriars Farm, Blackhorse Mill and Radwell;
- Ashwell Springs was being augmented, but more was needed;
- Creatures needed flowing water to exist;
- The Council needed to approach Affinity Water and the Environment Agency regarding this environmental emergency.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor David Barnard;
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg;
- Councillor Richard Thake.

In response Ms Moat and Mr Merideth-Hardy advised:

- They had been in contact with many different agencies;
- The vision was to form an aquifer wide group;
- Water companies had abstraction licences granted many years ago that were still in existence;
- Abstraction from the aquifer at any point resulted in the level of all of the rivers being desperately low.

The Vice-Chairman thanked Ms Moat and Mr Meredith Hardy for their presentation.

49 NOTICE OF MOTIONS

Audio recording – 26 minutes 13 seconds

The following motion had been submitted, due notice of which had been given in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.12:

A River Ivel

It was proposed by Councillor Tom Tyson, seconded by Councillor Paul Clark that:

This Council expresses its concern about the perilous state of the upper reaches of the River Ivel and other local chalk streams, including the Rivers Purwell and Hiz and St Ippolyts Brook.

Council notes that the River Ivel has been continuously dry in an area extending from the Ivel Springs Local Nature Reserve downstream to Radwell for a period of well over a year.

Council further notes that there has been no flow in the upper Ivel during half the months of the previous four years.

The River Ivel is one of the rare and ecologically important chalk streams of the Chiltern Chalk Aquifer. According to the Ivel Springs Greenspace Action Plan for 2010–2015, “Chalk rivers are extremely rare and included in the Herts Biodiversity Action Plan. The river and its wetlands are important habitats for a wide range of species”. This is a resource we should cherish and protect. Instead, the watercourses are dry, the fish are dead and other associated wildlife is gone.

Council is therefore determined to ensure that a healthy year-round water flow be restored and maintained in the upper reaches of the river from the area known as Ivel Springs down to Radwell Lake and beyond.

Furthermore, Council recognises that the disaster of the Ivel is not an isolated instance among the chalk streams of the Chiltern Chalk Aquifer: many others are suffering dangerously low levels and consequent environmental harm.

Council therefore undertakes to implement the following actions:

1. Elicit information from Affinity Water regarding their plans for reducing abstraction rates from the chalk aquifer:
 - (i) at Baldock specifically and
 - (ii) from the aquifer as a whole.
2. Elicit plans from Affinity Water with regard to use of AMP7 (2015–2020 Asset Management Plan) money to invest in effective measures to conserve and enhance the Ivel specifically and other local chalk streams generally.
3. Seek a pledge from Affinity Water that it will take the steps necessary to ensure that a specified minimum water flow is maintained in the upper Ivel throughout the year.
4. Seek assurance from the Environment Agency that it will monitor the impact of water abstraction from the aquifer on our local environment and take appropriate action where Affinity Water allows its activities to harm the environment.
5. Support and work with local interest groups, including the RevIvel Association in Radwell.
6. Support the establishment of an integrated, overarching partnership to enable all relevant agencies and organisations to collaborate with the aim of protecting the chalk streams of the aquifer in its entirety.
7. Lobby our constituency MPs for active support in all of the above.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor David Levett;
- Councillor Val Bryant;
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg;
- Councillor Steve Jarvis;
- Councillor David Barnard;
- Councillor Michael Muir;

- Councillor Ian Mantle;
- Councillor Richard Thake;
- Councillor Claire Strong;
- Councillor Michael Weeks.

It was proposed by Councillor Val Bryant that additional wording be added to Section 6 of the motion to read:

“To acknowledge the need for the above to be combined, an active policy for water conservation.”

That additional wording be added to Section 7 of the motion to read:

“With the intention of introducing or strengthening policies at Government level for water conservation.”

Councillor Tyson did not accept the amendments as they did not refer to water abstraction.

Councillor Tyson proposed that additional wording be added to Section 6 of the motion to read:

“Support the establishment of an integrated, overarching partnership to enable all relevant agencies, Local Authorities and organisations to collaborate with the aim of protecting the chalk streams of the aquifer in its entirety.

It was proposed by Councillor Claire Strong that Section 4 of the motion be amended to read:

“Seek assurance from the Environment Agency that it will continue to monitor the impact of water abstraction from the aquifer on our local environment and take appropriate action, including consideration of withdrawing abstraction licences, where Affinity Water allows its activities to harm the environment.”

Councillors Tom Tyson and Paul Clark accepted the amendment.

Following debate it was:

RESOLVED:

That this Council expresses its concern about the perilous state of the upper reaches of the River Ivel and other local chalk streams, including the Rivers Purwell and Hiz and St Ippolyts Brook.

Council notes that the River Ivel has been continuously dry in an area extending from the Ivel Springs Local Nature Reserve downstream to Radwell for a period of well over a year.

Council further notes that there has been no flow in the upper Ivel during half the months of the previous four years.

The River Ivel is one of the rare and ecologically important chalk streams of the Chiltern Chalk Aquifer. According to the Ivel Springs Greenspace Action Plan for 2010–2015, “Chalk rivers are extremely rare and included in the Herts Biodiversity Action Plan. The river and its wetlands are important habitats for a wide range of species”. This is a resource we should cherish and protect. Instead, the watercourses are dry, the fish are dead and other associated wildlife is gone.

Council is therefore determined to ensure that a healthy year-round water flow be restored and maintained in the upper reaches of the river from the area known as Ivel Springs down to Radwell Lake and beyond.

Furthermore, Council recognises that the disaster of the Ivel is not an isolated instance among the chalk streams of the Chiltern Chalk Aquifer: many others are suffering dangerously low levels and consequent environmental harm.

Council therefore undertakes to implement the following actions:

1. Elicit information from Affinity Water regarding their plans for reducing abstraction rates from the chalk aquifer:
 - (iii) at Baldock specifically and
 - (iv) from the aquifer as a whole.
2. Elicit plans from Affinity Water with regard to use of AMP7 (2015–2020 Asset Management Plan) money to invest in effective measures to conserve and enhance the Ivel specifically and other local chalk streams generally.
3. Seek a pledge from Affinity Water that it will take the steps necessary to ensure that a specified minimum water flow is maintained in the upper Ivel throughout the year.
4. Seek assurance from the Environment Agency that it will continue to monitor the impact of water abstraction from the aquifer on our local environment and take appropriate action, including consideration of withdrawing abstraction licences, where Affinity Water allows its activities to harm the environment.
5. Support and work with local interest groups, including the RevIvel Association in Radwell.
6. Support the establishment of an integrated, overarching partnership to enable all relevant agencies and organisations to collaborate with the aim of protecting the chalk streams of the aquifer in its entirety.
7. Lobby our constituency MPs for active support in all of the above.

50 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Audio recording – 58 minutes 29 seconds

(A) Item Referred from Cabinet – 31 October 2019 – Hertfordshire Growth Board

The Leader of the Council presented the referral from the meeting of Cabinet held on 31 October 2019 regarding Hertfordshire Growth Board together with the associated report considered at that meeting.

Cabinet recommended to Council that Cabinet supports the proposed Memorandum of Understanding relating to the Hertfordshire Growth Board, attached as Appendix D, and recommends to Council the signing of the agreement.

The following Member took part in the debate:

- Councillor David Levett.

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Stears-Handscorn, seconded by Councillor Paul Clark and:

RESOLVED: That the proposed Memorandum of Understanding relating to the Hertfordshire Growth Board, attached as Appendix D, be supported and the agreement signed.

(B) Item Referred from Cabinet – 31 October 2019 – Council Plan and Council Objectives 2020-2025

RESOLVED: That the referral from the meeting of Cabinet on 31 October 2019 regarding the Council Plan and Council Objectives be considered with Item 8 (Minute 51 refers).

51 COUNCIL PLAN 2020-2025 AND COUNCIL OBJECTIVES 2020-2025

Audio recording – 1 hour 4 minutes 3 seconds

The Leader of the Council presented the report entitled Council Plan 2020-2025 and Council Objectives 2020-2025 together with the following appendix:

- Appendix A - Council Plan 2020-2025

The Leader of the council then presented the referral from the meeting of Cabinet held on 30 October 2019 regarding the Council Plan and Council Objectives.

Cabinet recommended to Council that the following documents be adopted with the amendments as discussed:

- Appendix A – Council Plan 2020 -2025;
- Appendix B – Proposed Actions;
- Appendix C – Achievements.

It was proposed by Councillor David Levett and seconded by Councillor Claire Strong that the first Paragraph of the recommendation in the referral be amended to read:

“Subject to sustainable budget proposals and resources being agreed by Council to ensure the Plan can be delivered without impacting statutory and key services, the following documents are adopted with amendments as discussed:”

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Ian Albert;
- Councillor Martin Stears-Hanscomb;
- Councillor David Barnard;
- Councillor Claire Strong;
- Councillor Steve Jarvis;
- Councillor Daniel Allen;
- Councillor Ian Mantle;
- Councillor Judi Billing;
- Councillor Michael Muir;
- Councillor Simon Harwood;
- Councillor Sam Collins;
- Councillor Ruth Brown.

Upon the vote the proposed amendment was lost.

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb, seconded by Councillor Paul Clark and:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Council Plan; which provides a summary of objectives and of activity to support the progression of the following Council Objectives be approved:
 - Be a more welcoming and inclusive council;
 - Build thriving and resilient communities;
 - Respond to challenges to the environment;
 - Enable an enterprising and co-operative economy;
 - Support the delivery of good quality and affordable homes.

- (2) That the following document be approved:
 - Appendix A - Council Plan 2020-2025, including Proposed Actions and Achievements of the Council in 2018/19.

REASON FOR DECISION: The Council plan is a key element of the corporate business planning process, as a high level strategic document it sets out the Council's priorities for the next year. As an overarching policy framework document, it guides and influences the use of Council resources; providing a focus for activities, plans and services the Council provide.

52 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

Audio recording – 1hour 38 minutes 32 seconds

There were no questions from Members.

The meeting closed at 9.10 pm

Chairman