

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

DECISION SHEET

Meeting of the Council held in the Council Chamber, District Council Offices, Gernon Road,
Letchworth Garden City
on Thursday, 23rd September, 2021 at 7.30 pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors John Bishop, Paul Clark, Adam Compton, George Davies, Faye Frost, Gary Grindal, Simon Harwood, Keith Hoskins, Jim McNally, Ian Moody, Gerald Morris and Terry Tyler.

Councillors Juan Cowell and Sue Ngwala were absent.

2 MINUTES OF MEETING ON 8 JULY 2021

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 8 July 2021 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

3 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business notified.

4 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

- (1) The Chair welcomed those present at the meeting;
- (2) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded;
- (3) 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) The Chair drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.
- (5) The Chair reminded Members that the usual rules of debate and times to speak would apply.
- (6) The Chair announced that she did not intend to call for a comfort break unless Members requested one after 9pm.

a) PRESENTATION OF A GIFT TO PAST CHAIRS OF COUNCIL

The past Chair of Council for the civic year 2019/20 Councillor Jean Green was presented with a gift in recognition of her service.

It was:

RESOLVED: That the Council place on record its sincere thanks and appreciation to Councillor Jean Green for services as Chair of the Council during the 2019/2020 civic year.

b) PRESENTATION OF A GIFT TO CHAIR'S SECRETARY

The Chair announced that she would be arranging for flowers to be delivered to Penny Copestake, Chair's Secretary, in recognition and thanks for her hard work and support.

It was:

RESOLVED: that the Council place on record its sincere thanks and appreciation to Penny Copestake for her hard work and dedication as the Chair's Secretary.

c) ANNOUNCEMENT OF CHAIR'S CHARITIES

The Chair announced that the charities she had chosen to support this civic year were Tilehouse Counselling and Garden House Hospice.

d) RETIREMENT OF SERVICE DIRECTOR PLACE

The Chair announced the retirement of Vaughan Watson, Service Director – Place, after 31 years of work for the authority.

It was:

RESOLVED: That the Council place on record its sincere thanks and appreciation to Vaughan Watson for the valuable service to both this Authority and to Local Government.

5 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no questions from the public.

6 NOTICE OF MOTIONS

There were 2 motions on notice submitted in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.12.

a) MOTION ON THE PLANNING SYSTEM

RESOLVED:

That the Council notes:

Local resident concerns about their reduced ability to object to building works under the changes to Permitted Development Rights which have been made under this Government.

Widespread concerns and condemnation of the Planning White Paper proposals across Local Government, The Planning and Architecture Sector, and organisations concerned with protecting green spaces and heritage.

That the Council is concerned that:

Government proposals to change the planning system will remove the rights of residents to influence or object to inappropriate development within the District.

If implemented, the Government's proposals will undermine the character of our district and give carte blanche to developers to build what they please across large 'zones' without having to make proper contribution to the community.

That the Council believes that:

Planning works best when developers and the local community work together to shape local areas and deliver necessary new homes as part of coherent communities, with a full range of facilities.

Residents' rights to have a say over developments that will change the area must be protected.

Local councils, in consultation with their businesses and residents are best placed to understand the issues in their area and respond with a spatial strategy tailored to that area.

That Council calls for the Government to protect the right of communities to be involved in individual planning applications by scrapping its Planning White Paper and instead:

- Undertake a wholesale review of the Planning system, including Permitted Development Rights, in consultation with all those involved.
- Make the Planning appeal system properly accountable to local people
- Reduce the ability of Ministers to influence planning decisions, especially where they have an undeclared interest.

b) MOTION ON THE CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCY BILL

RESOLVED:

Council notes that:

Many local authorities are playing an important role in the UK taking action to achieve net zero carbon emissions, and to protect and revitalise local wildlife and natural habitats.

Parliament in May 2019 declared an Environment and Climate Emergency and this Council has already declared a Climate Emergency.

There is a Bill before Parliament—the Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill (published as the “Climate and Ecology Bill”), which, if it became law, would require the government to develop a strategy to address the emergency that would ensure:

the ecological emergency is tackled shoulder to shoulder with the climate crisis in a joined-up approach;

the Paris Agreement is enshrined into law to ensure that UK does its real fair share to limit global temperature rise to the most stringent end of the Paris agreement -1.5°C;

the Leaders Pledge for Nature is enshrined into law to ensure that the UK's ecosystems are protected and restored with a focus on biodiversity, soils and natural carbon sinks;

the UK takes full responsibility for our entire greenhouse gas footprint (i.e. consumption emissions plus shipping, flights and land-based transport) by accounting for all of the emissions that take place overseas to manufacture, transport and dispose of the goods and services we import and consume;

the UK takes full responsibility for our ecological footprint so that we protect health and resilience of ecosystems along both domestic and our global supply chains; and

an independent, temporary Climate and Nature Assembly is set-up, representative of the UK's population, to engage with the UK Parliament and UK Government to help develop the emergency strategy.

Council therefore resolves to:

- Support the Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill;
- Inform the local media of this decision;
- Write an open letter to all North Hertfordshire MPs (shared with our residents through local and social media) urging them to sign up to support the Bill, or thanking them for doing so; and
- Write to the CEE Bill Alliance, the organisers of the campaign for the Bill, expressing its support.

7 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

In accordance with Standing Order 4.8.11(b) three questions had been submitted by the deadline date for questions set out in the constitution.

(A) Local Plan Modifications

Councillor David Levett to Councillor Paul Clark (Executive Member for Planning)

In the absence of Councillor Paul Clark, Councillor Ian Mantle (Deputy Executive Member for Planning) gave a response.

(B) NHDC providing help and support for those affected by crisis in Afghanistan

Councillors Judi Billing and Ruth Brown to Councillor Gary Grindal (Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health)

In the absence of Councillor Gary Grindal, Councillor Sean Prendergast (Deputy Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health) gave a response.

(C) Waste Service Disruption

Councillor George Davies to Councillor Amy Allen (Executive Member for Recycling and Waste Management)

In the absence of Councillor George Davies, Councillor Claire Strong asked the question.

8 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

8(a). Referral from Finance, Audit and Risk on 15 September 2021 – Financial Regulations

RESOLVED: That the proposed changes to the Financial Regulations be adopted as attached as Appendix B to the report.

REASONS FOR DECISION: The constitution requires that the Financial Regulations are kept under review. Minor changes can be approved by the Chief Financial Officer, but more significant changes are approved by Council.

8(b). Referral from Cabinet on 21 September 2021 – Medium Term Financial Strategy

The Chair advised that this referral would be taken with Item 9.

8(c). Referral from Cabinet on 21 September 2021 – Council Plan 2022-27 and Council Objective 2022-2027

The Chair advised that this referral would be taken with Item 10.

9 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

RESOLVED: That Council adopt the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2022-27 as attached at Appendix B.

REASON FOR DECISION: Adoption of a MTFs and communication of its contents will assist in the process of forward planning the use of Council resources and in budget setting for 2022/2023 to 2026/2027, culminating in the setting of the Council Tax precept for 2022/23 in February 2022. This will (alongside the Council Plan) support the Council in setting a budget that is affordable and aligned to Council priorities.

10 COUNCIL PLAN 2022-2027 AND COUNCIL OBJECTIVES FOR 2022-2027

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Council approves the Council Plan (Appendix A) with the three new Council Priorities as outlined below:
 - People First
 - Sustainability
 - A Brighter Future Together
- (2) That Council delegates the authority to make any minor changes in relation to the Council Plan to the Managing Director in consultation with Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council.

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. There is a need to provide closer links between the Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Strategy

11 COUNCILLORS PARENTAL LEAVE POLICY REPORT

RESOLVED: That Council approves the Policy at Appendix A.

REASON FOR DECISION: There is presently no legal right to Parental (maternity, paternity or adoption) leave for Councillors. Councils may approach this issue individually and this is one step that can be taken by this Council to demonstrate it is welcoming to all and be as inclusive / family friendly for Councillors as possible.

12 ELECTORAL CYCLE CONSULTATION

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg moved the recommendations as in the report. Councillor Ruth Brown seconded.

There was debate.

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The Democratic Services Manager advised that officer workload and staffing issues would make extending the timeframe of the consultation difficult and impact the analysis of any results from the consultation.

Richard Beesley, Consultant from the AEA, advised that the timeframe of the next round of consultations was determined by the Electoral Commission and therefore could not be altered.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg proposed and Councillor Ruth Brown seconded the following amendment:

- 1) That the consultation period end date be extended from 1 November to 8 November and;
- 2) that the questions '- elect all of our Councillors every four years?; or - elect one third of our Councillors every year' be amended to stipulate 'District Councillors,' in both instances.

Following the vote the amendment was carried.

Following the vote on the motion as amended it was:

RESOLVED:

That Council:

- (1) Approves public consultation of the following question for four weeks starting on 4 October 2021 until 8 November 2021:

Do you think we should (select one only):

- elect all of our District Councillors every four years?; or
 - elect one third of our District Councillors every year
- (2) Agrees that a Special Meeting of Council be convened following the consultation in order for Council to consider the results of the consultation and determine proposals for any change in its electoral cycle arrangements.

REASON FOR DECISION: To undertake public consultation in preparation for a decision on the Council's electoral cycle.