

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

SOUTHERN RURAL COMMITTEE

**MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES,
LETCWORTH**

ON THURSDAY, 29TH SEPTEMBER, 2022 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Councillor George Davies (Chair), Councillor Mandi Tandi (Vice-Chair), Ian Moody, Lisa Nash and Claire Strong*

In Attendance:

Abigail Hamilton (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Aimee Flack (Community Engagement Officer), Edward Leigh (Senior Transport Policy Officer), Louis Mutter (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer)

Also Present:

At the commencement of the meeting approximately 3 members of the public, including registered speakers.

99 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1:12

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ralph Muncer

Councillors Terry Tyler, Sam North, David Barnard and Faye Frost were absent

100 MINUTES - 30 JUNE 2022

Audio recording – 1:19

Councillor George Davies, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Mandi Tandi seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 30 June 2022 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

101 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2:11

There was no other business notified.

102 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2:34

- (1) The Chair welcomed those present at the meeting, especially those who had attended to give a presentation;

- (2) 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.

103 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 2:34

David Sample, Parish Clerk at Offley Parish Council, thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee regarding funding for a new noticeboard as follows:

- Offley Parish has two villages and two hamlets
- We need your support and are applying for a small grant to help replace one of the noticeboards within Offley village.
- The noticeboard is run down, it leaks, the wind makes it rattle, among other things
- We have received a small grant from Councillor Barnard on his locality budget and we have been saving some money within the Parish precept over the last 12 months.

The Chair thanked Mr Sample for his presentation.

There were no questions from Members.

104 GRANT APPLICATION - OFFLEY PARISH COUNCIL

Councillor Claire Strong proposed, Councillor Lisa Nash seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee allocate £500 to Offley Parish Council towards a new noticeboard for the village of Offley as outlined in 8.1.1-8.1.4 of the officer's report.

105 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 4:39

John Ferguson, Head Teacher of Kimpton Primary School, thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee regarding funding for a painting station as follows:

- Since covid, like a number of schools, we have faced problems as children have returned back to school
- Our two main areas were physical development for our younger children and social, emotional and mental health battles and challenges that they have faced
- Set a project as a school to develop the Key Stage 1 playground outside.
- The project that we have started in total will cost £25,000.
- Over the last two years, thanks to the PTA and members of the school, we have managed to raise £12,500
- We have started work on the playground this week, starting with the physical side. The play trail is being fitted now
- We are looking to bring in the other elements which will support our children around social, emotional and being able to express themselves
- This is why we are looking for a grant of £1157 which will be for the art station
- As a school we are experiencing a high number of pupil premium children from disadvantaged families and there is the cost of living crisis that is affecting families.
- We're hoping that the outdoor art space will give opportunities for children that they may not have at home

- As a small school, with staffing we don't have the facilities to be able to have an art area indoors at the same time as break time. This will allow art to take place outside where it can be managed and supported by the adults at lunchtimes.

The Chair thanked Mr Ferguson for his presentation.

The following members asked questions:

- Councillor Ian Moody
- Councillor Claire Strong

In response to questions, Mr Ferguson advised:

- This is a small part of a bigger project. The £12,500 that we have already saved will go towards the physical side. We have climbing frames going in this week and we have a stage for children to perform on with a seating area for them to watch each other. There are other elements such as the painting station, an alphabet spiral, a roadway for them to move around and there is a water tower that they are able to use. We have chosen the art as the one area we want to start as the next part of the project.
- We haven't spoken directly to the County Councillor. One of our governors went to the local Parish Council meeting yesterday and they are going to hopefully help with £500 towards marketing to increase numbers. One of the biggest issues we face as a school is numbers. We have quite low numbers where we are based and this has impacted on the running costs of the school.

Councillor Claire Strong informed Mr Ferguson that she had contacted Councillor Thake.

106 GRANT APPLICATION - KIMPTON PRIMARY SCHOOL

The Chair noted that Councillor Ralph Muncer, who was unable to attend this evening, has expressed his support for this grant application.

Councillor Claire Strong informed Mr Ferguson that Councillor Richard Thake is considering awarding £500 from his locality budget towards the painting station and that Mr Ferguson should contact Councillor Thake regarding this. She proposed an amended amount of £657 should be awarded.

Councillor Claire Strong proposed, Councillor Ian Moody seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee allocate £657 to Kimpton Primary School towards a painting station as part of their playground development as outlined in 8.1.5-8.1.10 of the officer's report.

107 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 9:29

Aimee Flack presented the grant application on behalf of Breachwood Green Charity Group (CIO) who were unable to attend. She summarised the presentation which included:

- Breachwood Green Charity Group conduct monthly parish-wide litter picks to keep the area clean using local resident volunteers
- They provide pop-up not-for-profit coffee shops to encourage social interaction and mobilisation in the local community

- They would like funding for hall hire and refreshments for two community coffee mornings which will be held in October and December 2022.
- It is hoped that charging for the refreshments it will go towards funding future events
- They would like funding for management of their website which is used to communicate and engage with the local residents and avoid paper wastage
- They would also like funding for the annual insurance for litter picking
- Local residents will benefit from the groups work.
- The meetings will provide an opportunity to connect and build community resilience
- In one year they have increased from 4 to 15 volunteers who are involved in the monthly litter picking
- We have collected in the parish over 4 skips full of debris over 2021/2022
- Residents have noticed a positive difference and our County Councillor David Barnard supports this

The following members asked questions:

- Councillor Ian Moody

In response to questions, Aimee Flack advised:

- The match funding was £10 from a previous coffee shop in June. The aim would be funds that are raised from these two coffee shops would help towards the future coffee mornings.

108 GRANT APPLICATION - BREACHWOOD GREEN CHARITY GROUP (CIO)

In response to a question from Councillor Strong, Aimee Flack advised that £300 was for website management, £180 was for hall hire, £90 was for refreshments and £98.97 was for the litter picking insurance

Councillor Claire Strong proposed an amendment to the grant, that the hall hire, refreshments and litter picking insurance should be awarded, totalling £369. The website management could be taken to the parish or their County Council for some of the locality budget. She highlighted that the Council awarded them £441 for their equipment in 2021. She also commented on the amazing work that they do litter picking.

Councillor George Davies suggested that the remainder of the grant application relating to the website management should be deferred so if they cannot find match funding they can reapply and explain this part of the funding to Members.

Councillor Claire Strong proposed, Councillor Ian Moody seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee approved £369 to Breachwood Green Charity Group (CIO) towards two community coffee mornings and annual insurance for litter picking as outlined in 8.1.11-8.1.14 of the officer's report. The Committee deferred £300 towards website management to allow Members to ask questions and get further details about what this will go towards.

109 GRANT APPLICATIONS AND COMMUNITY UPDATE

Audio recording – 11:55

The Chair invited Aimee Flack, Community Engagement Officer, to update Members on the budget

- The 2022/23 base budget was £8700 with £222 carried forward from 2021/22 budget
- £1780 was granted at the last Committee meeting so this leaves an available budget of £7142.
- The grant applications from this meeting total £2316 and if the Members agree all the grants outlined in this report it would leave a balance of £4826

Following this information, the Members then voted on the grant applications.

Aimee Flack presented the report entitled Grants & Community Update and gave a verbal presentation, which included:

- We had our first online parish forum meeting on Monday. This is an opportunity for local Parish Councils to meet online and discuss issues and projects they are working on
- We had 4 parishes that were represented and thanks to Councillor Claire Strong for attending
- Christine Adams was also invited. She is the rural engagement officer at Citizens Advice North Herts to introduce her role and what they can offer. She is very keen to meet everyone in the rural area to see how they can support
- Topics that came up were the cost-of-living crisis and what benefits were out there, as well as the North Herts Council 'Easing the Squeeze' campaign.
- We received positive feedback from the meeting
- The next one will likely be in Springtime as we are planning to do them twice a year. These details will be shared closer to the time
- Earlier this week we presented a webinar for Ukrainian guests and their hosts.
- In the report it says it was the 14th September, but the date was changed to the 27th.
- The webinar will be made available on YouTube
- We highlighted activities and initiatives available such as the North Herts Ukraine support page.
- We also highlighted the coffee mornings in Hitchin town hall and North Herts museum. This is available to all refugees and is next being held on the 26th October. It provides an opportunity to speak to local groups and ask for advice with things such as English lessons or career advice
- We have also been processing grants to utilise the health protection board funding. Some of the funding was awarded to Citizen Advice North Herts, who received £19,327 towards a post-covid rural outreach project which is funding the rural engagement officer role and it was Christine who attended the parish forum meeting.
- To celebrate local democracy week, we have been contacting local primary schools to coordinate visits from local Councillors. We have had a couple of schools in the Southern Rural area who are interested and thank you to those who are helping with this.
- Since writing the report there are a couple of updates of grant applications.
- From the last meeting in June, we awarded funding to Holwell Parish Council to tables, chairs, cooker and a fridge freezer for their new pavilion. The building is almost ready and they are finishing the painting and tiling in the changing rooms and once this is done they will be purchasing the tables and chairs and so on
- From last year, the Kimpton Cricket Club who were awarded £2500 in June 2021 towards the purchase of a cricket mower. Simon Thompson, the Chair of Kimpton Cricket Club expressed his gratitude for the committee's generosity. This piece of kit was a key element in their development plan and has allowed them to maintain and improve the quality of the playing experience. Other elements of the development

wouldn't have been possible without this grant has been the promotion and hosting of the ECB All-Stars and Dynamos programmes for cricketers aged 5-8 and 8-11 respectively as well as the extension beyond friendly Sunday cricket into the Herts League cricket. In their first competitive junior match the under 10s had fun and won against local rivals in Hatfield. Also the senior team managed to finish top in division 12 of the North Herts Saracens league and promotion up to division 10 for the next season.

Councillor Claire Strong shared that she hasn't received great feedback as doing things during the day doesn't always suit people. As a Council we used to run a rural conference covering multiple topics which started late afternoon and ran into the evening and had high attendance. Also the presentation that was done on the CAB had a lot of information within it and this would've been good to bring to the Southern Rural committee because Councillors to know what is available and can take the messages back to the communities. Councillor Strong suggested that we should look at the possibility of doing this within Southern Rural.

Councillor Strong also highlighted an error within the spreadsheet as Holwell Parish Council seemed to have been duplicated

In response to questions from Councillor Strong, Aimee Flack advised:

- All the Parish Council's in Southern Rural area were invited
- There were Parish Councils invited from other rural areas outside Southern Rural and one expressed interest
- We will continue to promote this
- We wanted to get a sense of what topics they might want to discuss within the meetings but is happy to adapt from feedback

Councillor George Davies supported the idea that the parish forum has the opportunity to include all the Parish Council's, not just those within Southern Rural.

Councillor George Davies proposed, and Councillor Mandi Tandi seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee be recommended to endorse actions taken by the Community Engagement team to promote greater community capacity and well-being for Southern Rural.

REASON FOR DECISION:

- (1) To ensure the Members are kept informed of the work of the Community Engagement Team
- (2) This report intended to inform Members of the financial resources available. It draws attention to the current budgetary situation by assisting in the effective financial management of the budgets. This ensures that all actions are performed in line with the Authority's Financial Regulations, the Council's Constitution, and the guidance of the existing Grants policy as agreed by Cabinet in January 2020.
- (3) The awarding of financial assistance to voluntary organisations and the use of discretionary spending allows the Committee to further the aims of the Council Plan.

110 LOCAL CYCLING AND WALKING INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

Audio recording – 33:23

Edward Leigh, Senior Transport Policy Officer, introduced the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan consultation and gave a presentation which included:

- Presenting a draft Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan which is now out for consultation as of Monday. This will run until the 7th November
- This is important as it is the basis on which the County will be applying for large amounts of funding from Active Travel England and the Department for Transport as well as securing funding from developments through Section 106 agreements to improve the built environment.
- This includes wider pavements, safer junctions, more pedestrian and cycle crossings, protected cycle lanes and modal filters and other traffic management measures designed to make cycling and walking safer and more attractive
- Modal filters means restricting the flow of vehicles to just cycles, or cycles and buses. This is to divert traffic away from areas where there is high conflict between cycling and walking and driving. This is particularly in the town centres
- There are also other methods to diverting traffic, such as creating one way systems
- This part of the plan will focus on North Herts towns, Knebworth and the interurban Hitchin-Stevenage route.
- The routes within this plan were audited on the ground by WSP to evaluate and propose changes to improve this for cycling and walking
- This needs to be done for rural areas but we don't have the resources available to create this plan in rural areas.
- Additionally we need to make towns safer for people to cycle and walk in, so when people commute in from rural areas it is also safer for them.
- This plan will start in the towns and will be built outwards into rural areas
- The County and District Councils have agreed to work in partnership to undertake a review of this plan within two years of its adoption.
- Subject to having available funding, the intention is to commission a second iteration which takes into account all the rural areas and this is the time scale we are working to
- We are still looking for input and feedback from rural areas now as this will help feed into the second iteration
- There are key routes that aren't covered but have been identified as priority routes, for example Ashwell to the railway station and some routes around Knebworth.
- The consultation is live at [Hertfordshire.gov.uk/LCWIP-NorthHerts](https://hertfordshire.gov.uk/LCWIP-NorthHerts) until the 7th November.
- Councillors are encouraged to respond, as well as encouraging residents, local businesses and community groups to respond
- This isn't just about cycling, but also walking
- It is also important for those who use a wheelchair or mobility scooter to respond
- On the consultation website, there is a story board for each of the towns, Knebworth and the interurban route from Hitchin to Stevenage. In each of these, there is a page dedicated to what is happening in that area, as well as a map showing the details of each route and descriptions of the interventions.
- You can click anywhere on the map in the district and you drop a pin. You then can enter details of what your observations are. For example, if you spot a junction that is particularly dangerous
- These observations will be reported back to the County Council. The comments will be submitted anonymously, vetted by the web team, and then published to the public.
- There is a general survey allowing people to feedback any thoughts or recommendations they may have about the plan

- We are promoting this consultation jointly with the County Council, attending all area committees and town talks where applicable, joining Councillor community surgeries during the consultation and organising afternoon-evening drop in events.
- One of these drop in events is in Knebworth on the 20th October at the Knebworth Parish Centre from 3:15pm-7:30pm
- We will do similar events in Baldock, Royston and Letchworth.
- Hitchin is well covered due to the town talk and Councillor community surgery
- The event details will be shared in the Members Information Service
- The full report is available on the website.

The following members asked questions:

- Councillor Mandi Tandi
- Councillor Claire Strong

In response to questions, Edward Leigh advised:

- This plan has been informed by the Emerging Local Plan so takes into account the plan of future developments. The County is already using the draft plan as a basis for Section 106 commitments from those developments. The delivery timeframe depends on funding coming forward from Active Travel England and how much we can secure from developers for sustainable transport. Hopefully we will get a significant amount of money from the government and the County will be able to deliver at pace. It will probably take around a decade to deliver everything, but we can expect to see a lot of progress in the next 5 years.
- The government under the previous Prime Minister set the tone of raising the profile of Active Travel as a primary mode of people to travel. Every development needs to be connected in a wider network. Councillors are asked to support more controversial areas, such as taking away some road space to put in footpaths. These small sacrifices will be offset by the larger benefits for more people to walk and can help reduce congestion
- The County has written to all the Parish Clerks on Friday. We will make sure at least one more communication goes out to all Parishes. We have posters being printed to be distributed to Parish Councils to put up on their noticeboards. Both the County and District social media teams have materials to share and promote on all platforms and hopefully this will be picked up by the Parishes and pushed out further.
- The maps are at the back of the room with all the proposal details.

It was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Committee note the report
- (2) That Members are encouraged to respond to the North Herts District LCWIP consultation draft and encourage residents and local organisations to do so too

111 WARD MATTERS AND OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS - MEMBERS' REPORTS

Audio recording – 53:53

Members gave updates on the following Ward Matters and Outside Organisations:

Knebworth Twinning Association –

Councillor Lisa Nash advised that the Knebworth Twinning Association are trying to get much younger membership and have been doing a lot more with schools and have the French teacher at the school involved as well as primary schools involved. They are doing things more informal, such as a meeting in the pub for new members.

Three rural policing community surgeries in Hitchwood, Offa and Hoo –

Councillor Claire Strong advised that we have had three of the rural policing community surgeries. There was one in Offley, one in Pirton and one in Whitwell. Heather Barrows, our local PCSO, was trying hard to engage. It wasn't well attended, but one held in the pub had slightly better attendance. There was a meeting to reset the police priorities for the rural areas and this was a good meeting in Offley. It was well attended and had good discussion and we reaffirmed some of the areas going forward. We will have them again later in the year, and if we boost up the agenda we could invite Parishes to come along and participate.

Councillor George Davies agreed that this was a good idea as we often get Parish Councils requesting police attendance at their annual meetings to give reports. We could use the Southern Rural meetings to centralise this would be positive.

The meeting closed at 8.29 pm

Chair