

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES

Meeting of the Council held in the Council Chamber, District Council Offices, Gernon Road,
Letchworth Garden City, SG6 3JF
on Thursday, 28th November, 2024 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors: Clare Billing (Chair), Tina Bhartwas (Vice-Chair), Ian Albert, Daniel Allen, Amy Allen, David Barnard, Matt Barnes, Sadie Billing, Ruth Brown, Cathy Brownjohn, Val Bryant, Rhona Cameron, Jon Clayden, Ruth Clifton, Sam Collins, Mick Debenham, Emma Fernandes, Dominic Griffiths, Keith Hoskins, Steve Jarvis, Tim Johnson, Chris Lucas, Sarah Lucas, Ian Mantle, Nigel Mason, Bryony May, Caroline McDonnell, Ralph Muncer, Michael Muir, Sean Nolan, Steven Patmore, Louise Peace, Vijaiya Poopalasingham, Sean Prendergast, Martin Prescott, Emma Rowe, Claire Strong, Tom Tyson, Paul Ward, Laura Williams, Alistair Willoughby, Stewart Willoughby, Claire Winchester, Dave Winstanley, Donna Wright and Daniel Wright-Mason.

IN ATTENDANCE: Faith Churchill (Democratic Services Apprentice), Steve Cobb (Licensing and Community Safety Manager), Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), Ian Fullstone (Service Director - Regulatory), Edward Leigh (Senior Transport Policy Officer), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Callum Reeve (Electoral Services Assistant), Anthony Roche (Managing Director), Nigel Smith (Strategic Planning Manager), Sohanna Srinivasan (Principal Planning and Urban Design Officer), Melanie Stimpson (Democratic Services Manager), Jeanette Thompson (Service Director - Legal and Community) and Sjanet Wickenden (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer).

ALSO PRESENT:

At the start of the meeting 9 members of the public, including registered speakers were present.

53 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 46 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors David Chalmers, Elizabeth Dennis, Joe Graziano, Lisa Nash and Tamsin Thomas.

54 MINUTES - 19 SEPTEMBER 2024

Audio Recording – 2 minutes 5 seconds

Councillor Clare Billing, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Daniel Allen seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 19 September 2024 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

55 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 47 seconds

There was no other business notified.

56 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 52 seconds

N.B. Councillor Sam Collins entered the Chamber at 19:43.

- (1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be recorded.
- (2) The Chair reminded Members that the Council had declared both a Climate Emergency and an Ecological Emergency. These are serious decisions, and mean 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.
- (3) 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.

The Monitoring Officer informed Members that a general dispensation had been granted for Agenda Item 9 - Land North of Great Ashby (GA2) Strategic Masterplan Framework.

- (4) The Chair advised that the normal procedure rules in respect of debate and times to speak will apply.
- (5) The Chair advised that 4.8.23(a) of the Constitution applied to Agenda Items 9 and 10 and the corresponding referrals.
- (6) The Chair advised Members that there were changes to the order of the published agenda.

Also, that public participation would be immediately before the respective agenda items - 9 and 10.

- (7) The Chair welcomed newly elected Councillor Sarah Lucas to her first Council Meeting.
- (8) The Chair advised that tickets were now available to purchase for the Chair's Civic Event and Awards 2025, being held on Friday 28 February 2025.
- (9) The Chair and Members paid tribute to former Councillor Ray Bloxham.
- (10) The Chair and Members paid tribute to former Councillor Anthony Burrows.

Councillors Ralph Muncer and Daniel Allen paid tribute to the former Councillors.

A minute's silence was observed in memory of both former Councillors.

- (11) A donation was made to the Chair's Charity – SANDS on behalf of the estate of the former Councillor Michael Weeks.

59 NOTICE OF MOTIONS

Audio recording – 17 minutes 20 seconds

There was one motion submitted in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.15.

(A) Motion Similar to One Previously Rejected

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed the motion as follows:

The following motion has been submitted to consider a motion previously rejected, due notice of which has been given in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.15(b).

In accordance with paragraph 4.8.15(b) of the Council's Constitution, we the undersigned twelve members support the following motion being considered by Full Council at its meeting on 28 November 2024:

"That Full Council considers a report and recommendations on the North of Stevenage Masterplan at its meeting on 28 November 2024, following reconsiderations by the Project Board."

It is noted that the land to the north of Stevenage is allocated for development in the Council's Local Plan (NS1 Policy SP16), as a strategic site. The Council's adopted Local Plan polices requires preparation of such a Masterplan.

The motion of 11 July 2024 was lost, as per the debate, on the basis that there would be further examination by the Council's Local Plan Project Board of issues raised during debate.

The Project Board has considered these matters, and therefore the Masterplan has been referred for approval. There is no reason to delay reconsideration of the matter by Full Council.

The Council therefore resolves to consider any similar referral motions from Cabinet / motion.

Councillor Val Bryant stated that it was important to carefully review Masterplans, and that Officers had met with the developer after which detailed amendments and clarifications had been presented to Members and the Strategy Group.

Councillor Stewart Willoughby seconded the motion and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Full Council would consider the report and recommendations on the North of Stevenage Masterplan at its meeting on 28 November 2024, following reconsiderations by the Project Board and any similar referral motions from Cabinet.

57 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 23 minutes 12 seconds

N.B. Councillor Cathy Brownjohn left the Chamber at 20:33 and returned at 20:42.

The Chair invited Ms Silke Gruner, Mr Emanuele Lo Faro and Mr Edward Keyner to present to Council their presentation regarding Agenda Item 9 - Land North-East of Great Ashby (GA2) Strategic Masterplan Framework.

Ms Gruner thanked the Chair for the opportunity and provided a presentation for Members which included that:

- It had taken 10 years to get to this stage.
- This was a development of 600 homes including 250 affordable dwellings. The site would have a community centre and a primary school.
- This was a landscaped led development utilising the woodlands and providing an attractive edge to the site.
- The Masterplan had previously been described as excellent by Members and this reflected the preparation and commitment of the team. The team had worked with Officers and the Project Board to get to this point.
- Work was continuing with Officers on the pre application phase with an aim to submit an outline planning application in early 2025.
- There would be further details in the outline planning application including the housing mix and density and an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).
- There was ongoing work on a sustainable travel strategy linking the development, including improvements to bridleways.
- In coordination with the Highways Agency extensive modelling and assessment work had been completed regarding the traffic impact from the development
- There would be a primary school on the site and a community centre. There had been discussion regarding an NHS provision, but these were ongoing.
- The development would be implemented by a construction partner subsequent to any planning application.
- It was expected that the development including infrastructure would occur over a period of 5 years with 150 to 200 homes built each year.

The following Members asked points of clarification:

- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Tom Tyson
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Laura Williams
- Councillor Steve Jarvis
- Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham
- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor Sam Collins

In response to points of clarification, Ms Gruner advised that:

- There would be active travel routes between Great Ashby and Stevenage, some of which would be dedicated cycle paths.
- There had been a question-and-answer session at the Community Hall in Great Ashby.
- Questions had been raised regarding any NHS facilities however, this was not something under their control, a site would be made available if successful.
- There was an emergency vehicle access point from Back Lane.
- This was an allocated site in the Local Plan, the Local Plan had been agreed with one site access. Highways had been consulted regarding this matter.
- There were ongoing discussions with Herts Badger Group regarding their concerns.
- There were ongoing discussions regarding an NHS facility. These would be progressed and a suitable location would be allocated if successful.
- Work was ongoing with the Highways team at Hertfordshire County Council regarding the access point with some minor alterations made to the geometry of the junction.

- The Highways team undertook computer modelling of the site reviewing existing movements and taking into account the growth from this and other developments. The modelling then predicted any pinch points, queue times and areas where more infrastructure would be required.
- It was expected that the bus loop would commence in phase one of the development and progress with the phases. It was anticipated that this would be when the Section 106 funding for the primary school was received and after the completion of a set number of dwellings.
- There were four areas identified for potential cycle routes or upgrades to existing routes, these would be finalised and secured at the reserve matters stage.
- The Highways modelling did not identify any further junctions for improvements. However, it did highlight the need to improve pedestrian and cycle routes and crossings.
- The emergency access from Back Lane would be controlled by key activated bollards. Pedestrians, cyclist and horse riders would be able to pass through this access route.
- The Highways modelling established that the junction was viable for the increased volume of traffic. The model was approved as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment and was available online. Pedestrian and cycle ways were encouraged.
- If there was a major shift in movement habits the assessment could be refreshed.
- The modelling took into account the developments at GA1 and in North Stevenage.
- There was an established shop in Great Ashby and it was considered that this was within walking and cycling distance and that therefore a new shop would not be viable. The space could however be used for other commercial purposes.
- Several points were raised during the public consultation, however most of these discussions related to the outline planning and reserve matters stages of the development and were not for consideration under this item.
- The undeveloped land outside of the development site was not in their remit. There might be scope for the Highways team to discuss any access with the landowner.
- Councillors and Highways could influence the bus service however, this was not the remit of the developer.
- There was an international drive to shift traffic transport, this was especially successful in the younger generation. Public transport, cycle routes and pedestrian pathways were in place to assist with this.
- There was still some movement on the bus route and work was ongoing with the bus company and Highways, and Councillor could have input into these discussions.
- There had been considerable work with the GA1 developers especially regarding links to the local centres, community hubs and schools.
- The bus route although considered did not form part of the Masterplan.
- The engagement team had sent invitations to local residents informing them of the public consultations. These were also advertised locally including a leaflet drop in Great Ashby. Clarification could be sought regarding which Councillors were invited.
- Throughout the 15 years of engagement with this development, there had always only been one point of access to this site. Access from Back Lane was not viable, and no other alternatives had been put forward.
- To gain access from Back Lane would mean the destruction of kilometres of hedgerows and ditches, this was not ecologically or financially viable for 600 homes, and therefore had not been considered.

In response to points of clarification, Mr Lo Faro advised that:

- It was anticipated that the bus service would serve both the GA1 and GA2 sites with links into Stevenage.
- There were ongoing traffic surveys assessing existing parking areas to minimise any displacement.
- There had been a review commissioned by Highways regarding the access point and this review validated the one access point.

The Chair thanked Ms Gruner, Mr Lo Faro and Mr Keyner for their presentation.

The Chair noted that this concluded the public participation on Agenda Item 9 - Land North-East of Great Ashby (GA2) Strategic Masterplan Framework and reminded Members that no further questions would be addressed to the public participants.

61 LAND NORTH-EAST OF GREAT ASHBY (GA2) STRATEGIC MASTERPLAN FRAMEWORK

Audio recording 1 hour 12 minutes

N.B. Councillors Alistair Willoughby and Stewart Willoughby declared an interest regarding a family member employed by the Developer. The Monitoring Officer confirmed they had sought advice and a dispensation had been granted for the item.

Interim Executive Member for Planning and Transport, Councillor Daniel Allen, presented referral 8B from Cabinet and the report 'Land North-East of Great Ashby (GA2) – Strategic Masterplan Framework' and stated that:

- This site was allocated in the Local Plan for the development of 600 homes.
- Due to the size of the development a Masterplan was required following a public consultation.

The Strategic Planning Manager presented the report and provided a visual presentation of the site plans.

The following Members asked points of clarification:

- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham
- Councillor Steve Jarvis
- Councillor Laura Williams
- Councillor Ralph Muncer

In response to points of clarification, the Strategic Planning Manager advised:

- There would be minor, low level work required for the emergency access point on Back Lane.
- The landlord of the disused land had not indicated any potential forthcoming development of the land.
- Cycle times had focused on the two development sites.
- There would be a cycle route to the south for the secondary school and to the southwest to Stevenage Town Centre. Further routes would be reviewed at the next stage of the development.
- Developer contributions would be negotiated at the outline planning and reserve matters stages.

In response to points of clarification, the Senior Transport Policy Officer advised:

- An extensive upgrade would be required for general access from Back Lane, this development would not generate anywhere near enough S106 money for that.
- It was thought that an average person would take approximately 20 minutes to cycle to Stevenage train station from the site.
- Further bus service details would be required at the outline planning stage of the project. The ideal route would link both sites and link to the hospital. The residents of Great Ashby would also benefit from a more frequent service.

- There would be a physical locked restriction in place at Back Lane, Emergency services would have a key for access.
- The most direct cycle route to Stevenage would be via a recently built underpass. A review would occur regarding St Nicholas Park and any feasibility for a cycle path upgrade.
- Further tests regarding feasibility would occur at the outline planning stage, with the Planning Committee considering the details and reports.
- A recent traffic survey had occurred and using that modelling the impact of 1280 new vehicles suggested that 290 traffic movements would occur out of the area in peak morning traffic with 120 movement into the area. Highways had therefore not proposed any improvements but would encourage active walking and cycling.
- There were some improvements expected to a crossing at Mendip Way.

The following Members took part in debate:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Steve Jarvis

Points raised in debate included:

- There were concerns regarding the single access point.
- It should be considered whether additional access via Back Lane would outweigh the harm of any hedge removal.
- It was important to continue discussions with the NHS regarding the possibility of any healthcare provision.
- Residents and the public should be updated on each progression stage.
- The site was included in the Local Plan with one principal access point.
- It was often difficult to secure agreements at the Masterplan stage.
- Back Lane should not be used for access.
- It was optimistic to assume residents would walk and cycle, and more likely that they would drive.
- There were isolated woodlands that would not be attractive to walk or cycle alone through.
- The access onto and through the site was not satisfactory.

N.B. Councillor Dominic Griffiths left the Chamber at 21:18 prior to the vote on this matter and did not return.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Mick Debenham seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Strategic Masterplan Framework for the land North-East of Great Ashby (Local Plan site GA2), attached at Appendix A, was approved and adopted as a material planning consideration for relevant planning decisions relating to the site.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

- (1) To set an agreed design framework for the delivery of a strategic site within the Council's adopted Local Plan.
- (2) To accord with policy requirements of the Local Plan.

N.B. Following the conclusion of this item there was a break in the proceedings until 21:37. Councillor Ruth Clifton did not return after the break.

57 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 2 hours 7 minutes 35 seconds

The Chair invited Mr Richard Kelly to present to Council his presentation regarding Agenda Item 10 - North Stevenage Strategic Masterplan Framework.

- There had been ongoing engagement with the public, stakeholders, Stevenage Borough Council, the developers of HO3 and the Gravely Parish Councillors to get to this point.
- This was a high-quality development with supporting infrastructure, allotments, open spaces, a primary school and community building.
- The development would deliver 900 homes, of which 40% would be affordable.
- The overarching principles of the development were set out in the Local Plan.
- The Masterplan expanded on the policies set out in the Local Plan and considered how they would be assessed and mitigated during the Planning process.
- A detailed design code would be available at the reserved matters stage.
- The Masterplan had been amended to show how the two sites integrated, including the retail facilities in HO3 and the community building in NS1.
- Discussions were ongoing with the NHS regarding the use of the Community building.
- It was anticipated that it would take 4 minutes to cycle and 16 minutes to walk across the sites.
- The positioning of pedestrian, cycle and vehicle connection point between the two sites was the outcome of considerable discussions with both Councils and the Highways team.
- The access points had now been fixed with the commencement of work at the HO3 site.
- The NHS had not reached a conclusion regarding a GP surgery on the site.
- The development would incorporate the ratings contained in the recently adopted Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) standards.
- The outline planning permission had been submitted and included an environment scheme. This would be presented to the Planning Control Committee for consideration.

The Chair thanked Mr Kelly for his presentation.

The Chair noted that this concluded the public participation on Agenda Item 10 - North Stevenage Strategic Masterplan Framework and reminded Members that no further questions would be addressed to the public participant.

62 LAND TO THE NORTH STEVENAGE STRATEGIC MASTERPLAN FRAMEWORK

Audio Recording 2 hour 13 minutes 26 seconds

Interim Executive Member for Planning and Transport, Councillor Daniel Allen, presented referral 8B from Cabinet and the report 'North Stevenage Strategic Masterplan Framework' and stated that:

- There had been issues raised when this item was presented to Council in July 2024. The report utilised visual materials to provide an update and highlighted the changes made to the Masterplan after that meeting.
- The access points onto the site had been clarified as well as the access from the site on to the adjoining development. Vehicles would be able to travel between the two sites.
- The shops and school were within a 20 minute walk from all parts of the development.
- The developer would discuss NHS participation during the formal planning stage.
- The development aimed for Sustainability SPD gold standards in health placemaking, open space, sustainable drainage and sustainable travel.

- The Project Board considered the updates and amendments in October 2025 and recommended it to Council for reconsideration.
- Members attended a briefing on this matter on the 6 November 2024.

The Principal Planning and Urban Design Officer presented the report and provided a visual presentation of the site plans.

The following Members took part in debate:

- Councillor Caroline McDonnell
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Ralph Muncer

Points raised in debate included:

- There were improvements made to the plans which installed confidence and had addressed the previous concerns from July.
- The Council were to adopt the local spaces, this was good news.
- It was unfortunate that changes could not be made to the Stevenage site.
- Perhaps future Masterplans with transcending borders could be more joined up.
- The additional information was a good addition to the report.
- The Council thoroughly scrutinises decisions which affect the community.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Dave Winstanley seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That following the Full Council decision not to adopt the masterplan in July 2024, Council noted the additional information and clarification in the report.
- (2) That the Strategic Masterplan Framework for North Stevenage, attached at Appendix A, was approved and adopted as a material planning consideration for relevant planning decisions relating to the site.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) To facilitate the delivery of a strategic site within the Council's adopted Local Plan.
- (2) To accord with policy requirements of the Local Plan.

60 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Audio recording – 2 hours 29 minutes and 21 seconds

The Chair advised that the referrals 8B and 8C from Cabinet had been taken with the respective items on the agenda.

8A) Statement of Gambling Principles 2025-2028

Councillor Alistair Willoughby presented the referral from the Licensing and Regulation Committee and advised that:

- It was a requirement to review the policy every three years.
- There had been safeguarding updates to included, the White Ribbon Campaign, Violence against Women and Girls Charter and child sexual exploitation.

Councillor Daniel Allen thanked Officers for their hard work preparing this item.

Councillor Alistair Willoughby proposed and Councillor Daniel Allen seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Council adopted the Statement of Gambling Principles 2025-2028 policy.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

- (1) Licensing authorities are required to publish a policy every three years by virtue of section 349 of the Gambling Act 2005 (“the Act”).
- (2) A new policy must be published by 3 January 2025 to comply with this statutory requirement.
- (3) The policy builds on the effectiveness of the existing policy with minor amendments to reflect changes in legislation.

58 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

Audio recording – 2 hours 31 minutes 49 seconds

In accordance with Standing Order 4.8.11, five questions had been submitted by the required deadline set out in the Constitution.

(A) Removal of Public Bins

Councillor Matt Barnes to Councillor Amy Allen (Executive Member for Recycling and Waste Management).

"At Full Council in January, when discussing the planned removal of public litter bins arising from the new waste contract, the Executive Member for Recycling and Waste Management said:

"Once the proposed criteria is ready I will be able to share it with ward Councillors. Based on these criteria the potential for removal list will be shared with Members; the proviso being that if Members collectively want to keep a bin, then another will have to go. We will be asking Members to consider the need for the bin. We are also happy to engage with Parish Councillors who will no doubt have the knowledge of need in their Parish."

The Administration now appears set to go ahead with these plans without doing any of this.

Last month it wrote to Parish Councils where 30% or more will be removed, but did not supply the proposed criteria or the potential removal list - making it difficult for them to provide any meaningful feedback. Parishes below this threshold, like Knebworth or Great Ashby, as well as unparished areas like Baldock, Letchworth and Hitchin, received no proactive communication, and nor were ward Councillors provided with any details about the impact in our areas - despite these very clear promises being made.

Could the Executive Member therefore explain to Council what has changed, and why the Administration now feels it is acceptable to go ahead with these plans without telling anyone which bins they intend to remove?"

Councillor Amy Allen gave a response as follows:

“The Waste Client Team are currently managing a program of projects in order to ensure the successful implementation of a new Waste Recycling and Street Cleansing Contract in May.

Like all new projects that are reviewed as they are implemented, a Member’s workshop was held on 12 September 2024 an opportunity for Councillors to consider and comment on the criteria used in assessing the need for littler bins.

Following this the team communicated updates on the project via the Members Information Service, that is the MIS which everyone gets every week. This provided updates on two occasions and is circulated to both Ward and Parish Councillors. The second update also included the letter to be sent out to those impacted by 30% or more bins being removed. Parishes and Ward Councillors are welcome to contact the team if they have any concerns about their area or the project as a whole.

Since the publication of the MIS note the team have responded to approximately 40 inquiries about the project, including those not in the 30% bracket such as Knebworth and Great Ashby and have shared criteria for each area where requested, as an example Knebworth Parish were proactive in engaging with the team on bins in their area and were able to identify bin locations which were felt to be of value over others area. A new list has therefore been mutually agreed affecting the same number of bins.

The Waste Client Team are continuing to liaise with other areas who have contacted them including arranging site meetings where necessary. However, to remind Members that the principles of the project have already been agreed and these will not change. Should Members have any non ward specific concerns about the role out of the project, please get in touch with myself.”

Councillor Barnes asked a supplementary question, as follows:

“Comparing notes with colleagues there are some clear discrepancies in the data, in some cases bins which are on the list either do not exist or removed long ago, in other cases bins which do exist are not on the list at all meaning their future is unclear. Given these finds are you confident that the decisions being made are robust and fair and, if you are, will you now agree to make the entire list available to members so that the plans can be properly scrutinised?”

Councillor Amy Allen responded:

“I will speak to my Service Director and my Contract Manager about sharing details but, if there are bins that do not exist, that could be for many reasons including that someone had nicked it, with a couple in Royston, or set fire to, so if those could actually be reported to us , then that would be very, very helpful.

I’ll get back to you on all the other bits and pieces when I have spoken to Sarah.”

(B) Royston Leaner Pool

Councillor Tim Johnson to Councillor Mick Debenham (Executive Member for Environment).

“Earlier this year, Cabinet resolved to explore further funding options for the Royston Learner Pool. Please could the Executive Member update Council on the current status of this project?”

Councillor Debenham gave a response as follows:

“Members will be aware that the current business case for building a learner pool at Royston is not affordable and therefore Cabinet agreed not to proceed with the build at this time. However, Officers have been investigating other potential sources of funding which could help bridge the funding gap.

Today the Council’s Grant Officer has investigated opportunities for external grants but, unfortunately, we have not found any suitable funds to apply to. Service Director – Place has also written to Royston Town Council to explore whether there could be any opportunities for them to provide funding. As of this moment we have yet to receive a formal response.

Separately, Officers are exploring Section 106 contributions from future developments. Sports England have calculated a potential £180,000 contribution towards pool space which could be allocated against any future project. The wider project to decarbonise Royston Leisure Centre and to build the gym extension is now entering into the detailed design stage so it is highly unlikely that the building of a learner pool can be accommodated within this project therefore, any new business case would have to be considered post 2025/26. In the meantime, Officers will continue to investigate opportunities including alternative build designs which may lower the overall capital costs.”

Councillor Johnson asked a supplementary question, as follows:

“I think that there is an opportunity, and I would just like you to guarantee please that the scheme will not be cancelled permanently?”

Councillor Debenham responded:

“I think everybody here wants there to be a learner pool in Royston. The problems we are facing with getting grants, between 2019 and 2023, 85 pools have closed, public pools so most of the grant funding is towards keeping existing pools open, rather than extending ones that are there but, it is £2.5M pounds that was put into the Capital Allocation for this in the 2024/25 budget, and it will be down to the next budget, where I cannot comment on whether it will still be there but, it has not been removed as of yet.”

(C) Churchgate Regeneration

Councillor Ralph Muncer to Councillor Daniel Allen, Leader of the Council.

“To ask the Leader of the Council (a) how much the Churchgate Regeneration Project will cost and (b) how the Council intends to fund the Churchgate Regeneration Project?”

Councillor Daniel Allen gave a response as follows:

“You know I cannot answer your question Ralph, the Council is still working through the options having listened to the public in our first round of consultations, until we have a preferred scheme and know how this will be delivered, we are unable to answer.”

Councillor Muncer asked a supplementary question, as follows:

“I have a copy of the North Herts Labour Party Manifesto for the local elections of this year and on page 14, and I am more that happy to provide colleagues opposite with this, it says deliver the Churchgate project and it says with a rubber stamp, a graphic saying that it is fully costed. Now evidently, we have heard from the Leader of the Council that it is not in fact fully costed because we do not know what the costs are at all. So does the Leader of the Council

know something that evidently Officers and Members do not or was the Labour party at the local elections at best being disingenuous to the residents of North Hertfordshire?"

Councillor Daniel Allen responded:

"Simply put Councillor Muncer, we listen to the public, we make sure that we make sure that we fund everything correctly, so yes, we will make sure that we put it through with a rubber stamp. We will make sure it happens unlike the previous promises that have been made before this and we will make sure that when it does happen it is fully costed and you will be able to see that we get a lot more."

N.B. Councillor Sadie Billing left the Chamber at 22:12 and returned at 22:29.

(D) Single Person Council Tax Discount

Councillor Ralph Muncer to Councillor Ian Albert, Executive Member for Finance and IT.

"To ask the Executive Member for Finance and IT how many households and/or residents in North Hertfordshire benefit from the Single Person Discount on Council Tax?"

Councillor Albert gave a response as follows:

"Simply put on current numbers there are 18,831 people claiming the single person's discount, which is approximately 33% of all the household in North Herts."

Councillor Muncer asked a supplementary question, as follows:

"During the summer the idea of the Labour Government scrapping the Single Person Council Tax Discount and thus depriving over well nearly 19,000 residents in North Hertfordshire of this crucial lifeline. Can the Executive Member for Finance and IT commit to maintaining the Councils, Single Person Council Tax Discount until 2028 the lifespan of this Council?"

Councillor Albert responded:

"It begs belief that when I was getting the question like this as a supplementary, I mean I was hoping that Councillor Muncer would be asking well actually have all the people needing single person discount are claiming it, because that would be a really good question and a sensible question to ask because that is how important that the single person discount.

I would like to think that Councillor Muncer will be asking about what is and has been claimed by a number of local community organisations for our Council Tax Reduction Scheme with its new banding system that actually has benefitted thousands of our residents. I would like to think you would be asking about how we are going to improve that even more but that clearly was not the question but, as Councillor Muncer knows the single person discount is not in the gift of any Local Authority is in the gift of government.

The Chancellor clearly decided, rightly decided that the single person discount will continue and that I welcomed and I hope that Councillor Muncer will welcome that as well but, what I am going to say is what we can do as a Council and single person discount is not something that we can influence but, I certainly will be more than happy that if the next time I see the Chancellor I will be more than happy to say thank you Rachel Reeves for continuing with the single person discount, that was absolutely the correct decision."

E) Civil Enforcement Officer Roles

Councillor Ralph Muncer to Councillor Daniel Allen, Interim Executive Member for Planning and Transport:

“To ask the Interim Executive Member for Planning and Transport (a) how many Civil Enforcement Officers are currently employed by the Council and (b) how many Civil Enforcement Officer posts are currently vacant?”

Councillor Daniel Allen gave a response as follows:

“We have the equivalent of 11 full time Officers with some post being part time, we currently have 9 posts filled with 2 further posts recruited to, with anticipated start dates in January 2025. We have 1 part time post vacant. We also have a Parking Enforcement Manager and a Parking Services Team Leader, so if all staff are present now, we usually have 4 Officer operating due to rest days however this number will drop if an Officer is on annual leave or sick.”

Councillor Muncer asked a supplementary question, as follows:

“Parking on Codicote High Street is an issue that people are rightly concerned about particularly with the over 400 homes of which are proposed to be built in the village, now obviously as awful lot of the Civil enforcement Officers are based and focused on our Town Centres and the car park of which are situated there but, can I ask the Leader of the Council what steps are going to be taken to ensure that rural communities like Codicote and Kimpton get their fair share and that parking restrictions are enforced in those rural communities to alleviate the pressures of drivers?”

Councillor Daniel Allen responded:

“Driver parking restrictions in Codicote are minimal, the High Street in Codicote does not have parking restrictions, there are only double yellow corner protectors at the junction of the High Street, and Dollimore Close, Newtown, Bury Lane and Heath Lane. Therefore, we have it as part of our mobile patrol, which means we drive through the High Street and we can make sure if there is anyone parked illegally during the shift when the resources allow. Our Officers do not walk patrol Codicote as it is unnecessary. They will drive patrol and if a vehicle is observed to be parked in contravention, then the Officer will park and walk to the vehicle.

Since the start of the financial year we have issued 21 penalty charge notices, which is quite significant considering the minimal parking restrictions, it would tend to suggest that people struggle to park legally. It is worth noting that blue badge holders can park on a double yellow line for up to 3 hours and that loading and unloading can take place on a double yellow line if it is constant, for up to 30 minutes. Drivers could be parked on double yellow line corners because of a convenience shop, it would be very difficult to catch these drivers due to Codicote not having its own dedicated Patrol, we acknowledge that we cannot enforce vehicles parked on pavements if there is no parking restrictions.

So, all in all, we are making sure that we support those local areas and it is very very disingenuous to suggest that we do not.”

59 NOTICE OF MOTIONS

Audio recording – 2 hours 50 minutes 20 seconds

N.B. Councillors Cathy Brownjohn and Sarah Lucas left the Chamber at 22:27 and did not return. Councillor Sadie Billing left the Chamber at 22:30 and returned at 22:43.

There were three motions submitted in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.12.

(B) Hitchin industrial Estate Fires

Councillor Jon Clayden proposed the motion as follows:

The Hitchin area has recently been plagued by a series of industrial fires associated with metal recycling facilities within the industrial area to the north of the town.

Most recently, a fire broke out on the industrial estate on the 8th of November 2024 at around 2:30am, producing a plume of smoke and steam that was visible across a wide area for much of the day, and affected local residents including children on their way to school. Fires also occurred in the same area in September 2024, July 2024, February 2024 and December 2023.

In response to these fires, there have been multiple calls for action in the press from Hitchin and Ickleford councillors, and the MP for Hitchin, across political parties and over several months. There has, however, been no intervention from the Environment Agency in response to these calls that members have been made aware of, despite their increasing urgency. Since the Environment Agency licences the recycling operators it has the authority to review or revoke their licences, but has not exercised this authority.

These fires put residents at risk of harm due to the significant air pollution they produce, which is spread over a wide area, and would be expected to be worsened by repeated exposure. The amount of air pollution present is, however, not quantifiable in the absence of systematic monitoring. Given the quantities of water needed to put them out, and the proximity of the River Hiz, they also threaten our precious chalk streams, which are already under pressure.

Council reiterates the importance of recycling to a sustainable North Herts, but clarifies unambiguously that this must not be at the expense of residents' long-term health.

Council acknowledges with gratitude the efforts of the Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service in responding to, containing and extinguishing these fires each time they occur, and investigating their causes. It nevertheless notes that these investigations have not led to meaningful reduction in the recent frequency of these potentially harmful fires, indicating that management of the associated risks appears to be ineffective or impossible.

Council therefore resolves to:

Instruct the Leader of the Council and the Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health to write promptly to the Environment Agency, to express North Herts Council's serious concerns about the safety of recycling sites on the Hitchin industrial estate, and request that their operators' licences be reviewed urgently.

Work proactively to instigate a system of air quality monitoring in the residential areas closest to the industrial estate.

Further instruct the Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health to report back to Council within six months with details of any action that has been taken by the competent authorities.

Councillor Louise Peace seconded the motion.

The following Members took part in debate:

- Councillor Dave Winstanley
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Sam Collins
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Lousie Peace
- Councillor David Barnard

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Tim Johnson
- Councillor Nigel Mason

Points raised in the debate included:

- The frequency of these fires was unacceptable.
- Ongoing prevention work was not always visible.
- The Ward Councillors had been in regular contact with Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) and the Environmental Agency (EA) voicing the concerns of their residents.
- The Leader of the Council had written to the Environment Agency regarding the Air Quality.
- The MP for Hitchin had sent an urgent request for air monitoring to the Environment Agency.
- The Managing Director had been on a fact finding exercise and been in contact with the press regarding the situation.
- No water had entered into the river, and Anglian water had tested the water silo which, met the required fowl levels.
- There would be a public meeting with the MP for Hitchin in January 2025.
- The air quality should have been tested during the fires to get a proper assessment.
- There was a Health and Safety risk to residents.
- There was a meeting on the 29 November 2024 with representatives from HCC, EA, this Council and the MP for Hitchin to discuss the situation.
- Residents were subjected to Heavy Good Vehicles (HGVs) transporting scrap for 12 hours a day.
- Residents had been supported during the 5 fires that had occurred this year.
- There had been fires at these sites dating back to 2018, this was not a new problem.
- The HGVs ignore road weight limits and were not appropriate for Hitchin.
- The changing wind directions meant that air quality testing would need to take place in several places.
- There was cross party support for residents.
- The Fire Service did an amazing job.
- Site licenses should be checked.
- The EA did not regard a lithium battery fire as a licensing breach. The regulations need to be tightened.
- During the most recent fire, local residents were told to shut windows, yet children were still expected at school.
- The smoke from these fires was having an effect on the health and wellbeing of residents.
- Why had no lessons been learnt from the previous fires.
- Concerns would be raised at a County Level.
- The fires were causing disruption and anxiety to residents.
- The County Council and the EA should change their policies to stop this from reoccurring.
- The HGV weight limit issue would be highlighted to the Road Police.
- Praise was given to Officers and the fire service who had put their lives on the line to attend these fires.

The Managing Director advised that the operating licences were issued from the Environmental Agency and not Hertfordshire County Council or North Hertfordshire District Council.

Having been proposed and seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Council

Instructed the Leader of the Council and the Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health to write promptly to the Environment Agency, to express North Herts

Council's serious concerns about the safety of recycling sites on the Hitchin industrial estate, and request that their operators' licences be reviewed urgently.

Work proactively to instigate a system of air quality monitoring in the residential areas closest to the industrial estate.

Further instructed the Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health to report back to Council within six months with details of any action that has been taken by the competent authorities in the intervening period to monitor pollution and mitigate the risks of future fires.

N.B. Councillor Emma Rowe left the Chamber at 23:01 and returned at 23:04.

(C) A1(M) Junction 6 (Welwyn) to 8 (Hitchin and Stevenage) Upgrade

Councillor Ralph Muncer proposed the motion as follows:

In December 2014, the Government announced the A1(M) between Junction 6 (Welwyn) to Junction 8 (Hitchin and Stevenage) would be upgraded to increase capacity by 50% as part of the £1.5 billion Road Improvement Strategy. Unfortunately, the scheme was delayed and subsequently cancelled in April 2023.

The A1(M) between Junctions 6 and 8 is already one of the busiest sections of the A1 between London and Leeds, and with the adoption of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan in November 2022, resulting in more than 12,000 new homes being built in close proximity to the motorway over the next decade, the pressure on this key artery is only set to increase.

Upgrading this section of the A1(M) would not only reduce congestion and delays making journey times quicker for drivers who use the motorway, but would also help to reduce pressure on local roads in North Hertfordshire such as the A602.

Therefore, Council resolves that the Leader of the Council writes to the Secretary of State for Transport calling on the Government to reinstate plans to upgrade the A1(M) between Junction 6 (Welwyn) to Junction 8 (Hitchin and Stevenage).

Council further resolves that the Leader of the Council writes to the Member of Parliament for Hitchin, the Member of Parliament for North East Hertfordshire and the Member of Parliament for Stevenage, urging them to call on the Secretary of State for Transport to reinstate plans to upgrade the A1(M) between Junction 6 (Welwyn) to Junction 8 (Hitchin and Stevenage).

Councillor Steve Patmore seconded the motion.

The Chair advised that there had been an amendment to this motion which had been proposed by Councillor Paul Ward and seconded by Councillor Matt Barnes and had been published as a supplementary document.

Councillor Paul Ward proposed the amendment as follows:

In December 2014, the coalition Government announced the A1(M) between Junction 6 (Welwyn) to Junction 8 (Hitchin and Stevenage) would be upgraded to increase capacity by 50% as part of the £1.5 billion Road Improvement Strategy. Unfortunately, the scheme was delayed and subsequently cancelled by the Conservative government in April 2023.

The A1(M) between Junctions 6 and 8 is already one of the busiest sections of the A1 between London and Leeds, and with the adoption of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan in November 2022, resulting in more than 12,000 new homes being built in close proximity to the motorway over the next decade, the pressure on this key artery is only set to increase.

Even now, before new homes are built, the existing lack of capacity on the A1(M) creates additional burden on surrounding local North / South roads used by the district's residents such as the B197 in Knebworth and B656 in Codicote.

As soon as the A1(M) has any capacity reduction on this section, such as the sink holes in March and September 2024 requiring lane closures, it brings chaos to the lives of our local communities. These corridors were never intended to be the extra capacity for the A1(M). The county's Local Transport Plan 2018-2031 specifically cites the delivery of the A1(M) smart motorway scheme as enabling traffic reductions on parallel routes to support active travel modes.

Upgrading this section of the A1(M) would not only reduce congestion and delays making journey times quicker for drivers who use the motorway, but would also help to reduce pressure on local roads in North Hertfordshire such as the A602, B197 and B656.

Therefore, Council resolves that the Leader of the Council writes to the Secretary of State for Transport calling on the Government to reinstate plans to upgrade the A1(M) between Junction 6 (Welwyn) to Junction 8 (Hitchin and Stevenage) that were cancelled by the prior Conservative government.

Council further resolves that the Leader of the Council writes to the Member of Parliament for Hitchin, the Member of Parliament for North East Hertfordshire and the Member of Parliament for Stevenage, urging them to call on the Secretary of State for Transport to reinstate plans to upgrade the A1(M) between Junction 6 (Welwyn) to Junction 8 (Hitchin and Stevenage) and mitigate the impact of needed housing growth for North Hertfordshire residents living near the A602, B197 and B656.

Councillor Matt Barnes seconded the amendment.

The amendment was accepted by Councillor Ralph Muncer as the proposer.

The following Members took part in debate:

- Councillor David Barnard
- Councillor Alistair Willoughby
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Ian Mantle
- Councillor Ralph Muncer

Points raised in debate included:

- The amendment was welcomed, as was the cross-party support.
- This motion was not about political point scoring.
- The road was not under Highways control.
- The Council declared a climate emergency, this project goes against that.
- The money would be better spent on railway improvements.
- England had the safest roads in Europe, this project was the only way to increase the road capacity.

Having been proposed as amended, and seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

That the Leader of the Council writes to the Secretary of State for Transport calling on the Government to reinstate plans to upgrade the A1(M) between Junction 6 (Welwyn) to Junction 8 (Hitchin and Stevenage) that were cancelled by the prior Conservative government.

That the Leader of the Council writes to the Member of Parliament for Hitchin, the Member of Parliament for North East Hertfordshire and the Member of Parliament for Stevenage, urging them to call on the Secretary of State for Transport to reinstate plans to upgrade the A1(M) between Junction 6 (Welwyn) to Junction 8 (Hitchin and Stevenage) and mitigate the impact of needed housing growth for North Hertfordshire residents living near the A602, B197 and B656

(D) Impact of Family Farm Tax on Rural Communities in North Hertfordshire

The Chair advised that due to the time already taken to determine the business on the agenda this item would be deferred to the Extraordinary meeting of Full Council on December 2024.

63 CONSTITUTIONAL & GOVERNANCE REVIEW

The Chair advised that due to the time already taken to determine the business on the agenda this item would be deferred to the Extraordinary meeting of Full Council on December 2024.

The meeting closed at 11.09 pm

Chair