NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERNON ROAD, LETCHWORTH, HERTS, SG6 3JF ON TUESDAY, 18TH MARCH, 2025 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Val Bryant (Chair), Ian Albert, Amy Allen, Mick Debenham, Tamsin Thomas and Dave Winstanley.*

In Attendance: *Ros Allwood (Cultural Services Manager), Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), Steve Crowley (Service Director - Enterprise), Philip Doggett (Principal Estates Surveyor), Andrew Figgis (Economic Development Officer), Robert Filby (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Ian Fullstone (Service Director - Regulatory), Chloe Gray (Enterprise Manager), Susan Le Dain (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Anthony Roche (Managing Director), Nigel Smith (Strategic Planning Manager), Louise Symes (Strategic Planning and Projects Manager) and Jeanette Thompson (Service Director - Legal and Community).*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting there were no members of the public.*

110 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 55 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Daniel Allen.

111 MINUTES - 11 FEBRUARY 2025

Audio Recording – 2 minutes 5 seconds

Councillor Val Bryant proposed and Councillor Mick Debenham seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 11 February 2025 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

112 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 56 seconds

There was no other business notified.

113 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 1 second

(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.

(4) The Chair advised for the purposes of clarification that 4.8.23(a) of the Constitution did not apply to this meeting.

(5) The Chair advised that the Service Director – Regulatory would be retiring shortly, after more than 35 years of service at the Council.

114 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 7 minutes 58 seconds

There was no public participation at the meeting.

115 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Audio recording – 8 minutes 3 seconds

The Chair advised that the items 6B, 6C, 6D, 6F and 6G referred from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Finance Audit and Risk Committee would be taken with the respective items on the agenda. Items 6A and 6E would be considered as standalone items.

6A) Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Proposed Parking Tariffs for 2025/26

In the absence of the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Tom Tyson as Vice-Chair presented the referral on this item. Councillor Tyson advised that following discussion, three amended recommendations were proposed for Cabinet to accept, with particular note of recommendation 2.2 which highlighted an error in the original calculations for parking charges.

In response to the referral, the Chair advised that the Princes Mews car park in Royston would no longer be available as a public car park from 7 April 2025, as the landowners McCarthy and Stone, had requested back ownership of the car park as they wished to develop the area as part of a bigger development.

The Service Director – Resources advised that a supplementary document had been published detailing all the revised parking rates if the 4% principle was correctly applied, but stated that this had not altered the total amount of forecast income quoted and that this amount was still correct.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Tamsin Thomas
- Councillor Mick Debenham

Points raised during the debate included:

- Members were happy to accept recommendation 2.3 as Cabinet fully supported the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and valued any recommendations they proposed.

- Members wished to thank Royston Town Council, the BID and Knebworth Parish Council for their support and willingness to work together on suggested car parking subsidies and were happy to delegate authority for final decisions to be made by relevant Directors and Executive Members.

Councillor Val Bryant proposed as amended and Councillor Dave Winstanley seconded and, following a vote it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Accepted the hard work from Royston Town Council, and the BID, and the support from them in relation to the 'Free after 3pm' scheme and to continue work with Knebworth Parish Council and to delegate the final decision on these discount schemes to the relevant Service Director, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Transport, the Executive Member for Finance and IT and the Service Director – Resources.

(2) Considered the increase in parking charges based on the updated modelling, specifically around the 4% increase in charges and reconfirmed the decision made by Cabinet on 11 February 2025.

(3) Endorsed the importance of Overview & Scrutiny in supporting Cabinet in reaching robust policy decisions and works with the Chair of the Committee to effectively facilitate this.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To implement an increase in car parking tariffs and permits within resident parking zones in order to effectively manage their use and in accordance with the Council's fees and charges policy as set out in its Medium- Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). To set car parking tariffs that support the achievement of modal shift away from private car use and to help support the vitality of town centres.

6E) Overview and Scrutiny Committee – RIPA Annual Report

In the absence of the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Tom Tyson as Vice-Chair presented the referral on this item. Councillor Tyson advised the committee recommended this to ensure compliance.

The Monitoring Officer presented the report entitled 'RIPA Annual Report' and advised Members that the final version of this report would include an amended Appendix B to the policy to reflect the change of title from 'Service Director' to 'Director' from 1 April 2025.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas proposed and Councillor Mick Debenham seconded and, following a vote it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet adopted the amended RIPA Policy (Appendix A – to include updated titles within the appendix to the Policy).

REASON FOR DECISION: To comply with the best practice guidance and the Committee's terms of reference.

116 GROWING BALDOCK STRATEGIC MASTERPLAN

Audio recording – 30 minutes 59 seconds

N.B. Cllr Ian Albert declared an interest in this item due to his appointment as a Hertfordshire County Councillor but advised that he had received dispensation from the Monitoring Officer and was allowed to remain to participate in and vote on this item.

In the absence of the Interim Executive Member for Planning and Transport, the Strategic Planning Manager presented the report entitled 'Growing Baldock Strategic Masterplan' and advised that:

- This report included the number of sites around Baldock highlighted for development as outlined in the Local Plan.
- All the identified sites were owned by Hertfordshire County Council.
- Council Officers had worked closely with developers in the production of the Masterplan.
- This was a large and complex project and this Masterplan contained areas in the scheme which were different to the Local Plan. Reasons for the changes were detailed in the report.
- This report was just one of the multiple stages required in delivery of this site.
- Following the Hertfordshire County Council Elections on 1 May, the Masterplan would be presented to Council in July supported with briefings from local developers.

In response to a question from Councillor Dave Winstanley, Councillor Val Bryant advised that the delay in bringing this Masterplan to Council was to give time for the various project boards to seek to reach agreement on contentious points, which would provide assurance for developers.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Mick Debenham

Points raised during the debate included:

- Whether this item should be discussed again at Cabinet in June before being referred on to Council in July. Consensus that an update would be provided in the standing Strategic Planning report.
- This was a good report, but there were still outstanding issues which needed to be resolved.

In response to a point raised during the debate, the Strategic Planning Manager advised that the funding required for the new schools was complicated, but there was agreement from all parties to work together to resolve the funding gap.

Councillor Val Bryant proposed and Councillor Mick Debenham seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That the Growing Baldock Strategic Masterplan attached at Appendix A, is approved and adopted as a material planning consideration for relevant planning decisions relating to the site.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION: To set an agreed design framework for the delivery of a strategic site within the Council's adopted Local Plan. To provide a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of multiple planned sites around Baldock. To accord with policy requirements of the Local Plan.

117 BARKWAY AND NUTHAMPSTEAD NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN - EXAMINERS REPORT

Audio recording – 45 minutes 12 seconds

In the absence of the Interim Executive Member for Planning and Transport, Councillor Val Bryant presented the report entitled 'Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan – Examiners Report' and advised that:

- The support of Cabinet was required to enable this neighbourhood plan to proceed to a local referendum.
- This neighbourhood plan had been produced by Barkway Parish Council.
- Consultations by the parish council had happened in June 2024.
- Examination had taken place and subject to certain modifications this neighbourhood plan was ready to proceed to a local referendum.
- As it was proposed to hold the referendum on 1 May alongside the Hertfordshire County Council elections, an 'Urgency Notice' had been published on the website.
- This would be the ninth neighbourhood plan in North Hertfordshire if adopted.
- Once approved neighbourhood plans were considered alongside the Local Plan.

Councillor Mick Debenham proposed and Councillor Dave Winstanley seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

(1) That the Examiner's report for the Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan was noted.

(2) That following the inclusion of the Examiner's proposed modifications to the Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan, as set out in Appendix A, the Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan was approved and it was approved to proceed to a referendum.

(3) That the Counting Officer be instructed to conduct a referendum on the Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan.

(4) That subject to Recommendation 2.3 and the outcome of the referendum, the decision to "make" the Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan be delegated to the Service Director – Regulatory in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Transport, as previously agreed by Cabinet in July 2018 (Minute 21).

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To progress the Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan, enable a referendum to take place and if more than 50% of those voting in favour of the Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan to "make" the Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan.

118 DEVOLUTION WHITE PAPER - INTERIM PLAN SUBMISSION

Audio recording – 50 minutes 5 seconds

The Managing Director presented the report entitled 'Devolution White Paper – Interim Plan Submission' and advised that:

- Appendix B to the cover report had been published separately as a supplementary document due to timing of the document being finalised.
- This paper had now been through seven of the twelve authorities' approval processes, with all having been approved so far.
- It was hoped to submit a single submission to local government from the whole of Hertfordshire by the deadline of Friday 21 March.
- This was an interim response which contained some ideas and options, but nothing had yet been finalised.

- It was hoped to narrow options down to a preferred option by the end of November 2025 deadline for final submissions.
- Whilst much of the discussion focused on the local government reorganisation, the importance of the devolution deal for Hertfordshire should not be forgotten, alongside the proposals for new unitary authorities.
- Following the Hertfordshire County Council elections on 1 May, it was hoped to have more clarity on proposals for the number of unitary authorities.
- The Council needed to recognise there may be changes requested to the document and therefore flexibility to make these changes would be required by delegated authority.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Tamsin Thomas
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Amy Allen

In response to questions, the Managing Director advised that:

- He was aware of the impact of the amount of time being spent on this work by Officers.
- The Council had been working well with other District and Borough Councils to assist the discussions with Hertfordshire County Council.
- The Interim Plan Submission was available to view on the Hub by Members and Officers.
- Boundary Commission guidance had been circulated by local government last week and it would be made available for Members to view on the Hub.
- The ongoing Community Governance Review would provide information on parish and town council requirements.
- There had been no staff wellbeing issues reported so far and a staff survey was being considered to find out how staff were feeling.
- A small number of staff had so far been identified for the project team required to support the Managing Director.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Dave Winstanley seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Noted the current draft of the Interim Plan Submission (Appendix B).

(2) Delegated authority to the Deputy Leader, in consultation with the Service Director Resources and Service Director Legal and Community, to agree and submit the Interim Plan to Government by 21 March 2025.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To ensure that the Council is complying with the request of the Secretary of State (Appendix A).

119 UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND PROCESS AND PROPOSED ALLOCATION FOR 2025/26 SPEND

Audio recording – 1 hour 11 minutes 33 seconds

Councillor Tamsin Thomas, as Executive Member for Enterprise and Arts, presented the report entitled ‘UK Shared Prosperity Fund Process and Proposed Allocation for 2025/26 Spend’ and advised that:

- This report sought delegated approval for the 2025/26 UK Shared Prosperity Fund spend allocation.
- The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) announced further funding in January 2025, with 2025/26 acting as a transitional year.
- The original programme ran for three years.
- The programme detailed a range of defined interventions, under three main schemes.
- The allocation of the Council in 2025/26 was a total of £490,564, of which at least £90,574 must be capital expenditure.
- Six workstreams could be supported from this application and further details could be found in the report.
- Overarching proposals aimed to continue the work which had already been delivered and to support the new schemes that would be of benefit to the community.

Following a question by Councillor Ian Albert, the Economic Development Officer advised that an evaluation of the funds spent in previous years was being undertaken as part of the closure of the 2022/2025 programme.

Following a question by Councillor Ian Albert, the Enterprise Manager advised that formation of a grants panel was one of the potential projects set out in the report and that she would be happy to discuss this further with Councillor Albert outside of the meeting.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed an addition to recommendation 2.2 to include the consideration of a grants panel.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed as amended and Councillor Tom Tyson seconded and, following a vote it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Considered and approved the proposed outline distribution of funding allocated to the Council by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for 2025/26 under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UK SPF) to specific schemes.

(2) Delegated approval of individual grants and payments relating to schemes funded by UK SPF 2025/26 to the relevant Directors in consultation with the relevant Executive Members as identified with reference to table 8.1. Consider a grants panel, where appropriate, for some of the grant funding.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

(1) North Herts Council will be provided with funding in May 2025 to allocate to schemes proposed in accordance with the revised Guidance for UK SPF for 2025/26 from the MHCLG (provided as Appendix 1 to this report).

(2) The funds regulations allow considerable flexibility in how the Council allocates funding to each approved Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) activity. On 3rd March, officers presented a report to the Political Liaison Board and to the Senior Leadership team who endorsed the proposal set out.

(3) We are seeking approval to delegate approval of spend decisions, payments or grants made under the schemes to the relevant Directors in consultation with Executive Members. Once Cabinet approval has been obtained, the individual projects will be managed by the relevant service areas.

120 CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE ACTION PLAN

Audio recording – 1 hours 26 minutes 54 seconds

In the absence of the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Tom Tyson as Vice-Chair presented the referral on this item. Councillor Tyson advised that the discussion had been around concerns of the action plan being turned into a smart objective.

The Managing Director presented the reported entitled 'Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan' and advised that:

- The corporate peers had advised in their review that specific actions should be set with specific timelines.
- This item could go back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in six months' time to review its progress against the action plan.
- There needed to be ongoing discussions between the leadership team and Cabinet to ensure the correct prioritisation of items.
- The Local Government Association (LGA) required the Council to publish its action plan within three months of the review.

Councillor Mick Debenham proposed and Councillor Ian Albert seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan was approved.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure that the Council responds to the matters identified within the CPC report, ensuring that the benefits of the CPC process are realised.

N.B. There was a break in proceedings following this item and the meeting reconvened at 21:15

121 COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2024-25 (QUARTER 3 UPDATE)

Audio recording 1 hour 39 minutes 59 seconds

Councillor Ian Albert, as the Executive Member for Finance and IT, presented the report entitled 'Council Delivery Plan 2024-25 (Quarter 3 Update)' and advised that:

- The changes to milestones were detailed in paragraph 8.2.
- Amber and red Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) showing actions to address performance, were highlighted in paragraph 8.4.
- The recommendation was to add the 'Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution' as a Corporate Risk in the plan.
- The 'Museum Storage Option' might also need to be added as a Corporate Risk as the project progressed.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Dave Winstanley seconded and, following a vote it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Noted the progress against Council projects as set out in the Council Delivery Plan and approved the changes to the milestones (Appendix A).

(2) Noted the performance against the performance indicators and confirms the actions detailed in paragraph 8.4.

(3) Approved the addition of a new Corporate Risk for Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: The Council Delivery Plan (CDP) monitoring reports provide Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and Cabinet, with an opportunity to monitor progress against the key Council projects, and understand any new issues, risks, or opportunities. Overview and Scrutiny are trialling having a focus on a specific Executive Member area of responsibility at each meeting. For their March meeting it is Planning and Transport. An extract of the Council Delivery Plan has therefore been provided for their meeting (i.e. focused on Planning and Transport projects, KPIs and risks), but the overall Council Delivery Plan will be publicised to all Members via the Members Information Service.

122 THIRD QUARTER INVESTMENT STRATEGY (CAPITAL AND TREASURY) REVIEW 2024/25

Audio recording – 1 hour 46 minutes 40 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Sean Nolan, as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Nolan advised that there had been discussions around:

- Looking into the effect borrowing to spend on capital programmes in the future would have on the Council.
- Looking at the future of the Council under the local government reform and what assets would go into the new organisation.

Councillor Ian Albert, as the Executive Member for Finance and IT, presented the report entitled 'Third Quarter Investment Strategy (Capital and Treasury) Review 2024/25' and advised that:

- A lot of time had been spent at the budget meeting (February Council meeting) talking about the Investment Strategy.
- How the Council would deal with capital finance requirements was detailed at Appendix F of that report.
- It was likely that the Council would have to look to borrow over the coming months.
- There was less slippage in this report due to the work carried out in Quarter 2 and following discussions around the capital programme in the budget meeting.
- Changes to the carried forward of the capital programme were detailed in Table 2.
- Changes to the forecast spend of the capital scheme were detailed in Table 3.
- All the investments were in accordance with the Investment Strategy as set out in paragraphs 8.11 and 8.12.

In response to a question from Councillor Dave Winstanley, Councillor Ian Albert advised that any element of borrowing would reduce investment income and internal borrowing was cheaper than external borrowing.

In response to a question from Councillor Dave Winstanley, the Service Director – Resources advised that the Council was expecting to move in to a need to borrow at the end of the financial year and that all capital spend had a cost due to lost interest. Where there was a need to borrow then there were further Minimum Revenue Provision costs.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed as and Councillor Dave Winstanley seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Noted the forecast expenditure of £16.816M in 2024/25 on the capital programme, paragraph 8.3 refers.

(2) Approved approves the adjustments to the capital programme for 2024/25 onwards, as a result of the revised timetable of schemes detailed in table 2 and 3, increasing the estimated spend in 2025/26 by £0.627M.

(3) Noted the position of the availability of capital resources, as detailed in table 4 paragraph 8.6 and the requirement to keep the capital programme under review for affordability.

(4) Was asked to note the position of Treasury Management activity as at the end of December 2024.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: Cabinet is required to approve adjustments to the capital programme and ensure the capital programme is fully funded. 3.2 To ensure the Council's continued compliance with CIPFA's code of practice on Treasury Management and the Local Government Act 2003 and that the Council manages its exposure to interest and capital risk.

123 THIRD QUARTER REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2024/25

Audio recording – 1 hour 57 minutes 1 second

The Chair invited Councillor Sean Nolan, as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Nolan advised that there had been discussions around:

- Looking at the ongoing risk around staffing and the effects of extra work on existing staff.
- Looking at plans to increase resources to support commercial refuse and recycling.
- Looking into why the income from planning applications had been lower expected.
- Looking at financial risks and the monitoring of risks which was well managed.

Councillor Ian Albert, as the Executive Member for Finance and IT, presented the report entitled 'Third Quarter Revenue Budget Monitoring 2024/25' and advised that:

- Some slippage and changes which would help improve the fund balance were detailed in Table 3, but would ultimately be planned to be spent, and Cabinet needed to be mindful of the estimated ongoing impact of £76K overall total for 2025/26 onwards.
- The overachievement of income from garden waste collections was due to an increase in subscribers which was positive going forward into the new financial year and new waste contract.
- The position on main fees and charges was highlighted in Tables 4 and 5.
- The overall impact on the general fund, including additional £23k of funding, was detailed in Table 7.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed as amended and Councillor Tamsin Thomas seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Noted this report.

(2) Approved the changes to the 2024/25 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.2, a £840k decrease in net expenditure.

(3) Approved the changes to the 2025/26 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.2, a total £807k increase in net expenditure.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: Members are able to monitor, make adjustments within the overall budgetary framework and request appropriate action of Services who do not meet the budget targets set as part of the Corporate Business Planning process.

124 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Audio recording – 2 hours 4 minutes 43 seconds

Councillor Val Bryant proposed and Councillor Mick Debenham seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended).

125 MUSEUM STORAGE OPTIONS - PART 2

N.B. This item was considered in restricted session and therefore no recordings were available.

In the absence of the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Tom Tyson as Vice-Chair presented the referral on this item.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas, as Executive Member for Enterprise and Arts, presented the report entitled 'Museum Storage Options – Part 2'.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Tamsin Thomas seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet approved the acquisition of Unit 1 City Park, Letchworth Garden City on the terms set out in the Part 2 report and noting the detailed Budget Cost Plan for adapting, fitting out and upgrading the building for museum storage.

REASON FOR DECISION: A limited number of modern buildings of this age and size become available to purchase or lease in Letchworth Garden City and surrounding area, particularly one on a long lease at a peppercorn rent for the full term, with an expiry date in 2150. Unit 1 includes land fronting Works Road and to the side of the unit, plus a large part of the car park with the ability to erect a fence to separate the area from the rest of the car park used by adjoining units. In addition, the Council already owns the long leasehold interest in Unit 3 City Park, Letchworth Garden City, having acquired it in June 2016 with that building being used for general archive storage, IT servers, offsite disaster recovery, careline business continuity and legal department storage.

126 MUSEUM STORAGE OPTIONS - PART 1

Audio recording – 2 hours 24 minutes and 2 seconds

In the absence of the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Tom Tyson presented the referral on this item.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas, as Executive Member for Enterprise and Arts, presented the report entitled 'Museum Storage Options – Part 1' and advised that:

- This report followed the Museum Storage Options Appraisal report presented at Cabinet on 19 November 2024.
- Following Cabinet on 19 November, Officers were tasked to look at viable options one of which was to find a suitable storage facility.
- A suitable storage facility had now been located, and approval was requested for the proposed acquisition of Unit 1 City Park, Letchworth Garden City.

- Unit 1 was a 25-year-old open plan warehouse and was in good condition as reported following a full building survey.
- Officers had submitted a conditional offer which had been accepted subject to approval.
- The warehouse would need refitting to preserve the museum collection.
- The property was being sold with a long-term lease of 150 years, with 100 years remaining.
- This property offered a reduced financial commitment and would allow the sale of the current site in Bury Mead, Hitchin.
- Facilities of this type did not come onto the market often and it was an attractive position.

The Cultural Services Manager expressed her thanks to Councillor Tamsin Thomas and the team as this solution would solve all the storage problems.

Following a question from Councillor Ian Albert, the Cultural Services Manager advised that she had been in touch with the Arts Council regarding a grant, but as this project would be starting so quickly, there was not enough time to wait. Lower lever applications of up to £250k were more likely to be considered sooner and the Heritage Lottery Fund was a good place to apply for such a smaller grant.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Dave Winstanley
- Councillor Val Bryant

Points raised during the debate included:

- Expression of thanks to Councillor Tamsin Thomas and all Officers involved for the hard work on this project.
- This solution would provide the Council with a fantastic museum building and also provide good storage facilities for the growing collection.

In response to points raised, Councillor Tamsin Thomas advised that although now it was merely a building on an industrial estate, the end result would be phenomenal. The museum was very important to the residents of North Hertfordshire and this new building would allow for it to be used by academic and community groups in ways that had not been previously possible.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas proposed and Councillor Ian Albert seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet approved the acquisition of Unit 1 City Park, Letchworth Garden City on the terms set out in the Part 2 report and noting the detailed Budget Cost Plan for adapting, fitting out and upgrading the building for museum storage.

REASON FOR DECISION: A limited number of modern buildings of this age and size become available to purchase or lease in Letchworth Garden City and surrounding area, particularly one on a long lease at a peppercorn rent for the full term, with an expiry date in 2150. Unit 1 includes land fronting Works Road and to the side of the unit, plus a large part of the car park with the ability to erect a fence to separate the area from the rest of the car park used by adjoining units. In addition, the Council already owns the long leasehold interest in Unit 3 City Park, Letchworth Garden City, having acquired it in June 2016 with that building being used for general archive storage, IT servers, offsite disaster recovery, careline business continuity and legal department storage.

The meeting closed at 10.15 pm

Chair