

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

**MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERONON ROAD, LETCHWORTH, HERTS DG6 3JF
ON TUESDAY, 26TH NOVEMBER, 2024 AT 7.30 PM**

MINUTES

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

In Attendance: *Antonio Ciampa (Accountancy Manager), Deborah Coates (Principal Strategic Planning Officer), Jo Doggett (Service Director - Housing & Environmental Health), Ian Fullstone (Service Director - Regulatory), Martin Lawrence (Strategic Housing Manager), Susan Le Dain (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Nigel Smith (Strategic Planning Manager), Jeanette Thompson (Service Director - Legal and Community) and Sjanel Wickenden (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer).*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting there were approximately 12 members of the public present, including registered speakers.*

Councillor Matt Barnes was in attendance as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

71 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2 minutes 1 second

There were no apologies for absence received.

72 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 10 seconds

There was no other business notified.

73 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 14 seconds

- (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.

74 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 3 minutes 32 seconds

The Chair invited Ms Hilary Napier to address the Committee regarding Item 7 Chesfield Conservation Area. Ms Napier thanked the Chair for the opportunity and provided the Committee with a verbal presentation, including that:

- She lived in the area at Chesfield that had been proposed as a conservation area.
- Last September Cabinet resolved that the proposed conservation area be deferred and that further consultations with residents were arranged to ensure that the People First priority of the Council was met.
- Heritage experts advising Ms Napier had concluded that the threshold of specialness and quality required for a conservation area had not been reached.
- Stevenage Borough Council had raised concerns regarding the proposed designation of the area.
- She requested that Members followed the People First priority of the Council to not progress with designation of a Conservation Area at Chesfield.

In response to a point of clarification from Councillor Ian Albert, Ms Napier advised that this process had been going on for a considerable period and was causing stress to the residents.

The Chair thanked Ms Napier for her presentation.

The Chair invited Ms Elaine Southern to address the Committee regarding Item 7 Chesfield Conservation Area. Ms Southern thanked the Chair for the opportunity and provided the Committee with a verbal presentation, including that:

- This area was soon to be enveloped by the development of around 2000 houses.
- Residents should not be required to pay a premium or seek permission to update buildings and fencing as was required in a Conservation Area.
- The only buildings of significant age were already protected and grade listed.
- Residents should be left to manage their properties amidst the housing development surrounding them.

In response to a point of clarification from Councillor Amy Allen, Ms Southern advised that animals often escaped into the fields and caused damage to fencing, therefore a more modern type of fencing was required to be used which was more robust.

The Chair thanked Ms Southern for her presentation.

The Chair advised that Mr Julian Pye, Associate Director of Hyas Associates, was in attendance at the meeting to be available to answer questions from Members regarding Agenda Item 7 – East of Luton Strategic Masterplan Framework.

75 ITEM REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Audio recording – 20 minutes 5 seconds

The Chair advised that the item referred from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be taken with Agenda Item 9.

76 CHESFIELD CONSERVATION AREA

Audio recording 20 minutes 20 seconds

Councillor Daniel Allen, as Interim Executive Member for Planning and Transport, presented the report entitled 'Chesfield Conservation Area' and advised that:

- The 2016 heritage assessment for North Stevenage 1 (NS1) recommended there should be investigation of a conservation area in Chesfield, as an extension to the existing conservation area in Stevenage.
- Consultation on a draft Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan took place between December 2022 and February 2023 and the results were reported to Cabinet in September 2023.
- Cabinet resolved to defer the decision to undertake further consultation based on representations received.
- After reassessment, the professional judgement of consultants advising the Council was that the area was still of sufficient interest to merit the designation of a Conservation Area.

The following Member asked questions:

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

In response to questions, the Principal Strategic Planning Officer advised that:

- Consultation had taken place with members of the public and heritage consultants.
- The Council was obliged to review heritage aspects within the district and to protect heritage assets.
- The benefits of the Chesfield Conservation Area to the Council would be reputational, not financial.
- There was already an element of individual buildings on site protected by historic grading.
- Permitted development rights were removed in a conservation area and any works carried out on a property would incur costs for the homeowners.
- Fencing works could be carried out in an emergency, but retrospective planning approval would then need to be obtained.
- The museum services team had not expressed any view on this proposal.

The following Members took part in a debate:

- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Dave Winstanley
- Councillor Amy Allen
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Tamsin Thomas

Points in a debate included:

- The designation of a Conservation Area at Chesfield would not provide any further protection for the heritage assets in the area which were already protected.
- There would be no benefit from imposing this and it would only cause issues for the local residents.

- The Members wished to acknowledge the stress that the residents have suffered whilst this proposal has been considered, but also the importance of having followed due process.

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

RESOLVED: Not to undertake further consultation and that no further work was undertaken on the proposed designation of a Conservation Area at Chesfield.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure that the historic assets within North Hertfordshire are appropriately assessed and designated to inform decision making for planning applications and in the preparation of neighbourhood plans and our Local Plan.

77 LAND EAST OF LUTON STRATEGIC MASTERPLAN FRAMEWORK

Audio recording – 38 minutes 13 seconds

Councillor Daniel Allen, as Interim Executive Member for Planning and Transport, presented the report entitled 'Land East of Luton Strategic Masterplan Framework' and advised that:

- This report asked Cabinet to refer to Full Council the approval of the Strategic Masterplan Framework for land to the east of Luton as a material planning consideration.
- Allocation of this site had already been agreed and was detailed in the Local Plan.
- This Masterplan detailed how the scheme would address the expectations and meet targets of the Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).
- The land to the east of Luton had been identified to meet housing requirements in the area.
- There would be provision of two primary schools, a secondary school and a local centre.
- Details of changes made to the Masterplan could be found in the plan itself and the summary document at Appendix B.
- Officers would provide Members with a presentation of key plans prior to the debate at Full Council on 28 November. The developer team, Luton Council and Offley Council would also be in attendance for the Item.
- Members had been invited to attend a briefing session on the masterplan on 14 November which had been well attended.

The Chair advised that the Strategic Planning Manager would be addressing points raised in an email received from Offley Parish Council on 20 November 2024 when he answered any questions from Members.

The following Members asked questions:

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

In response to questions, the Strategic Planning Manager advised that:

- This Masterplan was just one stage in a number of processes required to happen before the scheme reached delivery stage.
- This Masterplan committed to delivering 40% affordable housing. The legal agreement(s) accompanying any application(s) would ensure needs in Luton were met.
- One of the key issues of this Masterplan was to ensure the three different land ownerships worked together to create a high level of unity between the sites.

- Detailed planning stages allowed for a mixed range of housing both across and within each of the three sites.
- Public discussions had been held with Offley Parish Council at Cockernhoe regarding the views of the villagers and feedback could be found on page 97 of the agenda pack.
- Housing needs in Luton had been considered in allocation of the site in the Local Plan. The planning application stage would be the stage when any subsequent changes to the housing needs in Luton could be addressed.
- Hertfordshire County Council had been involved in the whole Masterplan process and both Highways and Education were supportive.
- There were already bus links from Stevenage to Luton and Hertfordshire County Council were not planning to build any new roads in the area.

In response to questions, the Associate Director or Hyas Associates advised that:

- The valuable characteristics of the area had been considered to ensure the villages were kept separate from the new development but also how to build cohesion between all the sites.
- Woodland and open spaces were valuable assets and would be preserved.
- Public consultation had been robust to ensure the best development of the area.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Mick Debenham

Points raised during the debate included:

- That Members acknowledged the concerns of Offley Parish Council and residents in the village of Cockernhoe.
- This Masterplan was a good plan and had been produced to a high-level design framework.
- The production of Masterplans should be supported as they ensured procedures were followed to ensure the best results for residents.

Councillor Amy Allen proposed and Councillor Val Bryant seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That the Strategic Masterplan Framework for the land East of Luton (Local Plan sites EL1, 2 & 3), 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 accord with policy requirements of the Local Plan.

78 LGO COMPLAINT REPORT

The Chair confirmed that agenda Item 8 – LGO Complaint Report had been withdrawn from the agenda.

79 SUPPORTED HOUSING SCHEME FOR WOMEN

The Chair invited Councillor Matt Barnes, as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Barnes advised that:

- An allocation of £73k was required to match fund a commitment from Hertfordshire County Council.
- This scheme would assist homeless women who have support needs, such as suffering from domestic abuse, mental health issues and substance abuse.
- It was difficult at this stage to predict how many women would benefit from this scheme.
- Druglink had the performance requirements on which to monitor the success of this trial and although the actual address would be restricted, relevant Ward Members would be informed of the scheme's presence in their area.

Councillor Dave Winstanley as Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health, presented the report entitled 'Supported Housing Scheme for Women' and advised that:

- This scheme would help address the growing need for housing by single homeless women in North Hertfordshire.
- This was a two-year pilot which would be run in partnership by Hertfordshire County Council and Druglink, which was a Hertfordshire based substance misuse charity.
- In December 2022 Cabinet had previously agreed funding of £73k of Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) ring fenced Homeless Prevention Grant (HPG) to support a similar scheme, which had fallen through.
- This proposal would offer a tailored safe space for women to empower them to gain confidence and independence and to develop skills to return to the community.
- This initiative would not only meet a critical local need but would support the commitment of the Council to tackle domestic violence in line with the White Ribbon accreditation.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Mick Debenham
- Councillor Dave Winstanley
- Councillor Tamsin Thomas

In response to questions, the Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health advised that:

- Residency of a unit would be offered to a suitable candidate from outside of the district if required.
- It was hoped to be able to secure funding from another grant at the end of the two-year pilot to continue with this scheme if it was a success.
- This scheme would be run from a single building in the district which would be administered by Druglink, a very experienced charity which offered the required services.

In response to questions, the Strategic Housing Manager advised that:

- There could be a proportion of residents sent from outside the district to escape violent domestic situations.
- Similarly, residents from North Hertfordshire benefited from being housed outside of the district when required.
- The Council worked in conjunction with SADA Domestic Abuse Service to manage demands for housing.
- It was difficult to estimate the turnaround of the 6 units until the scheme was up and running as the circumstances for each resident would vary.

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- Costs associated with this scheme would be similar to costs associated with the previous scheme which had fallen through.
- If the scheme was successful, after the end of the two-year pilot, all parties would consider funding options nearer the time.
- Druglink were very experienced and looked at a broad spectrum of services, providing support for needs such as poor mental health, domestic abuse and substance misuse.
- Meeting the support needs of survivors of domestic abuse was a key priority for the Council.
- The Council would be supporting Hertfordshire County Council with a 50/50 stake in the two-year pilot.
- This scheme would be run in a building already owned by HCC and the service would be closely monitored.
- The police would be notified once the scheme was approved in line with safeguarding procedures.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Dave Winstanley
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Amy Allen

Points raised during the debate included:

- This was a valuable service to provide in the district.
- Members were pleased to be able to support this scheme.

Councillor Amy Allen proposed and Councillor Tamsin Thomas seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet supported the allocation of £73k of ring fenced MHCLG Homelessness Prevention Grant to HCC to match fund the two-year pilot of Druglink's Supported Housing Scheme for Women.

REASON FOR DECISION: This proposal has been made in order to enable the two-year pilot to go ahead.

The meeting closed at 8.56 pm

Chair