

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 Monday, 16th June, 2025 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors: Keith Hoskins MBE (Chair), Sadie Billing (Vice-Chair), Clare Billing, Tina Bhartwas, Ian Albert, Daniel Allen, Amy Allen, Matt Barnes, Ruth Brown, Val Bryant, Rhona Cameron, Jon Clayden, Ruth Clifton, Mick Debenham, Elizabeth Dennis, Emma Fernandes, Joe Graziano, Tim Johnson, Ian Mantle, Bryony May, Caroline McDonnell, Michael Muir, Sean Nolan, Steven Patmore, Louise Peace, Sean Prendergast, Martin Prescott, Emma Rowe, Tamsin Thomas, Tom Tyson, Paul Ward, Alistair Willoughby, Stewart Willoughby, Claire Winchester, Dave Winstanley and Daniel Wright-Mason.

IN ATTENDANCE: Amy Cantrill (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Ian Couper (Director - Resources), Edward Leigh (Senior Transport Policy Officer), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Anthony Roche (Chief Executive), Nigel Smith (Director - Place), Sohanna Srinivasan (Principal Planning & Urban Design Officer), Melanie Stimpson (Democratic Services Manager), Jeanette Thompson (Director - Governance) and Douglas Traill-Stevenson (Property Solicitor) Roger Flowerday (Herts County Council Group Manager Local Plans and Strategic Development), Kate Ma (Herts County Council Senior School Planning Officer) and Anthony Proietti (Herts County Council Growth and Infrastructure Unit Team Leader).

ALSO PRESENT: At the commencement of the meeting 4 members of the public, including registered speakers.

13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2 minutes 00 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Nigel Mason, Sarah Lucas, Donna Wright, Vijaiya Poopalasingham, Laura Williams, Dominic Griffiths, Chris Lucas, David Chalmers, Ralph Muncer, Claire Strong, David Barnard, Steve Jarvis, Lisa Nash, Sam Collins and Cathy Brownjohn.

14 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 51 seconds

There was no other business notified.

15 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 56 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. The Chair confirmed that a dispensation had been granted by the Monitoring Officer to all dual hatter Councillors (i.e. those who are both County and District Councillors) for Item 6, Growing Baldock Strategic Masterplan.

The following Members advised that they had other conflicts, which had been discussed with the Monitoring Officer and a further dispensation had been granted:

- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor Emma Rowe
- Councillor Emma Fernandes

- (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 part of this meeting and that Members could not leave the Chamber during Item 6, Growing Baldock Strategic Masterplan. A comfort break would be held at an appropriate time, should proceedings continue at length.
- (6) The Chair advised of a change to the agenda order and Item 5, Referrals from Other Committees, would be taken following Agenda Item 6, Growing Baldock Strategic Masterplan, other than Referral 5A which would be taken alongside Item 6.
- (7) The Chair advised that Callum Reeve, Electoral Services Assistant, was leaving the Council and thanked him for his support to Members during his time at the authority.
- (8) The Chair advised that Jeanette Thompson, Monitoring Officer and Director – Governance, had been awarded the Lawyers in Local Government 'Legal Professional of the Year'. He paid tribute to the work Jeanette had done at the Council and congratulated her on the achievement.

16 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 10 minutes 25 seconds

The Chair invited Mr Paul Mumford, Ms Kitty Eyre and Mr Colin Haigh to speak on Agenda Item 6 – Growing Baldock Strategic Masterplan. Mr Mumford thanked the Chair for the opportunity and provided Council with a verbal presentation, including that:

- They represented the development company, Urban and Civic, and the County Council, as landowner.
- During the consultation, Urban and Civic had spoken to around 1200 individuals in and around Baldock, with lots of the proposals in the masterplan having been informed by these discussions.
- The consultation had been ongoing for 2 years and had involved two main consultation events in March and November 2023, which had been supplemented with further work with residents in surrounding villages, such as Bygrave, Ashwell and Radwell, and the immediate neighbours to the allocated sites.

- Further consultation had taken place with residents on Icknield Way East and Football Close, as there were major proposed changes to how people will move around on these roads.
- The 'Growing Baldock' message had gained traction throughout the consultation, to highlight that it was not just about the additional development but growing the whole town of Baldock.
- The new development would be nearly double the current size of the town, with 3300 homes allowed and currently 4500 homes in Baldock.
- This masterplan helped to meet policy SP9 of the adopted Local Plan, which set the framework of the plans which would be supplemented by outline planning applications. The work had been evidence based, visioned through the masterplan and provided frameworks for certain topics.
- Not everything in the masterplan was final and it was designed to be flexible. These areas included the provision of secondary education, which had a preferred approach outlined, but also provided alternative options, which would be considered at the planning permission stage. The other area was transport intervention, with around 30 to 40 interventions required the masterplan needed to allow a strong mechanism for deciding these at planning stage.
- They had continued to work collaboratively with Council Officers and Councillors to develop this plan.
- The next stage would be to submit a planning application for presentation in autumn 2025.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Tom Tyson
- Councillor Jon Clayden

In response to questions, Mr Haigh advised that:

- The aspiration of the County Council was to provide new, modern waste facilities and there were examples of these around the County. This was the plan for the reserved land, however, this would be discussed with the new County administration as to how it would be realised.
- If the County Council ceased to exist, following Local Government Reorganisation, it was anticipated that the assets of the County Council would transfer to the new relevant authority. Therefore, whichever authority North Herts Council became a part of would inherit and become the main authority for this site.
- It was normal as part of planning applications for the service provider to seek a contribution towards SEND provision, which could be either an on site provision or a contribution to provision off site. That would happen in this instance and the County Council would be seeking a provision towards SEND. If primary and secondary education sites were provided on site, then the preference would be for an on-site SEND provision.

17 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Audio recording – 1 hour 40 minutes 00 seconds

The Chair advised that the referral 5A from Cabinet would be taken with the respective item on the agenda.

5B) DIRECTOR RECRUITMENT

Councillor Keith Hoskins, as Chair of the Employment Committee, presented the referral from the Employment Committee.

Councillor Keith Hoskins proposed and Councillor Val Bryant seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Full Council appointed Isabelle Alajooz to the role of Monitoring Officer.

REASON FOR DECISION: The appointment of the Monitoring Officer is a function of Full Council under 4.4.1(i) of the Council's Constitution.

18 GROWING BALDOCK STRATEGIC MASTERPLAN

Audio recording – 24 minutes 33 seconds

Councillor Daniel Allen, as Leader of the Council, presented referral 5A from Cabinet on the report entitled 'Growing Baldock Strategic Masterplan' and advised that:

- This referral was considered by Cabinet in March 2025, but had been delayed to allow for the County Council elections in May 2025.
- These sites had been included in the adopted Local Plan, and included a new employment area, infrastructure, railway crossings, GP provision, a local centre and education provision.
- The sites included BA1, BA2, BA3 and BA10 of the adopted Local Plan.
- This was the largest development in the district for decades and would see another phase of implementation of the adopted Local Plan, which would prevent unwanted development elsewhere in the district.
- Council Officers had worked with consultants and the developer team to produce this masterplan framework, with Urban and Civic working hard to involve the local community.
- Certain aspects of the plan had changed through the consultation process, and were outlined in detail in the report, but included the proposed location of the GP surgery, the southern access to the site and the approach to secondary education provision.
- The masterplan set the framework against which all planning applications for these sites could be considered.

The Principal Planning & Urban Design Officer provided a visual presentation of site plans and advised that:

- The masterplan covered a set of sites around Baldock, which were included in the adopted Local Plan.
- These were major areas of development and thorough engagement had taken place with Officers, the public and the design panel. This had led to changes regarding access to the site, a rationalisation of educational options, a proposed underpass to provide active travel across the rail line and a local centre to compliment, rather than compete with, the existing High Street.
- BA1 would have primary education access, with two primary schools, Baldock Common would be an open greenspace to the north, Walls Field and other land to the south would be retained for open space provision.
- The health hub, waste provision and employment provision would be within BA10.
- The masterplan included a green infrastructure plan which outlined how humans and other species, and ecology, would benefit throughout the site. This included a Baldock greenway, which would be a 6 mile circular route around the town, Bygrave Common, a new park to the north and a new edge to the town, Walls Field would be taken out of agricultural use and there was a commitment to 10% Biodiversity Net Gain on site, which was currently expected to be exceeded.

- The aim was for 50% of all journeys to be on foot, by cycle or through use of public transport.
- There would be a new entrance to the north provided at Baldock station.
- Parts of Bygrave Road would be improved and other provision throughout the site, including car hubs and bus stops, would be provided.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Matt Barnes
- Councillor Tom Tyson
- Councillor Michael Muir
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Bryony May
- Councillor Paul Ward

In response to questions, the Senior Transport Policy Officer advised that:

- There would be two crossing points across the railway line provided. These would be an overground crossing, for walking, cycling and horse riding, at the eastern point and a now proposed underground crossing, for walking and cycling only, at the western point.
- A left turn ban at Whitehorse Street was still being discussed. The applicant team wanted this to be included, but the County Council authority was not convinced it was needed or appropriate. This would be confirmed later in the process.
- As works to the railway crossings progressed, the capacity under the existing bridge would be reduced and managed with traffic lights. There was still detailed modelling and design work on this, which would come forward at a later stage, but it was important to include as an option.
- The masterplan set an ambitious target for walking, cycling and use of public transport, but Officers were confident that this could be met, as Baldock was already a sustainable town, with good rail connections and its compact nature. As long as the right infrastructure was provided, there was reasonable confidence that the 50% target could be met.
- The bridge crossing of the railway would be the most expensive piece of transport infrastructure. It would need to be paid for from proceeds from the development, which would partly determine when it came forward. Although it may be thought desirable to bring it forward early in the build-out, there was a risk of it becoming a de facto bypass attracting new trips (e.g. away from the A505/A1), which would be difficult to reverse at a later stage.
- Mitigations were to be put in place at Letchworth Gate roundabout to reduce traffic through Baldock and Highways England were involved in the process.

In response to questions, the Director – Place advised that:

- The expected reduction in water demand per capita would mainly come through the build form design, rather than the SUDs management.
- In absolute terms, there would be more water demand, but the SUDs management was to ensure runoff water was more effectively directed back to streams.
- The masterplan made reference to the new strategic sewage connection to the Letchworth sewage works and conversations were ongoing with Urban & Civic and the utility providers. However, it was not for the masterplan stage to provide a solution to this.
- There had been extensive consultation on this masterplan, as outlined in the appendix. There were still existing concerns, centred around transport measures within the town and education provision. The provision of secondary education was one area which had developed in the masterplan following consultation with residents.
- The exact details of water extraction were not for the masterplan stage, but the policy applied to all developments was to promote reduction in water usage.

- Waste management would be reserved for a later planning application, but the overall strategy was to ensure the right journeys were made on the right networks.
- The application of the masterplan to future planning applications received was ultimately for the decision maker, the Planning Control Committee. But this masterplan document contained a lot of evidence and public engagement behind proposals, so should be considered similarly to a Supplementary Planning Document.

In response to questions, the Principal Planning & Urban Design Officer advised that:

- Urban & Civic had worked hard on the green infrastructure and ecology plans, which had been supported by the public.
- The masterplan set out that the aim was for a Gold standard rating for drainage, therefore they would be required to meet all the measures outlined in this.
- The masterplan steered away from use of the term 'Baldock Mound', but this area would be an eco-scrubland to support the greenway around the site.
- The employment provision on BA10 was flexible to allow for the best use, which would follow a more detailed study by Urban & Civic during the planning application process. It was currently expected that larger footprint buildings would be most suitable for this site.

In response to questions, the Herts County Council Group Manager Local Plans and Strategic Development, advised that the aspiration was to provide a transport plan which delivered for the residents. Urban & Civic had demonstrated that 50% of current vehicle movements were people passing through Baldock to another destination, rather than the town itself. These journeys should be retained on strategic road network, such as the A1M, which would create capacity to encourage people to walk and cycle within the town, and feel safe to do so, and also create capacity to meet additional needs from this development.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed the recommendation and this was seconded by Councillor Val Bryant.

The following Members took part in the Debate:

- Councillor Alistair Willoughby
- Councillor Stewart Willoughby
- Councillor Rhona Cameron
- Councillor Michael Muir
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Emma Rowe
- Councillor Tom Tyson
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Daniel Allen

Points raised during the Debate included that:

- There were both concerns raised by the community about the pressure this development might bring, but also opportunities residents are keen to embrace. This included increase in footfall for local businesses and the High Street.
- Local Councillors would push for the preferred option to provide a new secondary education facility on the site.
- It was important that the development did not move faster than the town could handle to ensure minimal impact on existing residents.
- All development in the town needed to enhance the character, culture and heritage of Baldock.
- The masterplan would allow a framework to hold Urban & Civic and Herts County Council to account as planning applications were received.

- The process so far had put community engagement at its core, with regular ability to meet, and raise concerns, with those delivering the scheme.
- The right infrastructure was needed on the site and across the existing town, including for young people.
- There were lots of people on waiting list for socially rented housing and it was important that this was provided as part of this development. There were currently very few affordable houses in Baldock and there needed to be a good mix of housing provided, with a suitable level of good quality, social rented housing.
- The new GP provision should be on the Royston Road, next to the existing industrial site, to ensure proximity to the railway station for access.
- This was a significant moment as it was the largest site included in the adopted Local Plan.
- There were initial concerns about integration of the development and whether it would become an urban extension, rather than development of Baldock. However, Urban & Civic had clearly engaged with residents and listened to concerns and addressed these through this masterplan.
- Whilst the development will have a large impact, with a two third increase on current number of houses, the developer team had work hard to make this feel a part of Baldock.
- It was disappointing that no confirmation had been provided on the educational provision, but it was understandable to keep options on the table.
- There was a plan provided for thousands of houses, but no agreement on the provision of secondary education. This was not an oversight, but a lack of vision in the masterplan process and therefore it was important to proceed with caution in adopting this masterplan.
- This site had been considered for many years now and would impact residents around Baldock in a significant way, especially those around BA1 which was closest to neighbouring villages.
- While the plan goes a long way to address concerns, some still existed regarding schools and transport elements of the plan. However, it was clear that Urban & Civic had engaged in meaningful outreach work and took on board suggestions of those in residents in villages around Baldock.
- There had been several strategic board meetings on this masterplan, during which Urban & Civic had demonstrated their detailed approach and flexibility.
- The lack of clarity on the provision of secondary education was a conundrum, due to the academy status and County funding, but was not due to lack of ambition.
- This development would bring further employment to the area and therefore boost the local economy, with both homes and jobs would be provided on site together.
- There would need to be further work with the new Liberal Democrat administration at the County Council to ensure delivery of plans.

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

RESOLVED: That that Growing Baldock Strategic Masterplan, attached as Appendix A, was approved and adopted as a material planning consideration for relevant planning decisions related 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 provide a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of multiple planned sites around Baldock.
- (3) To accord with policy requirements of the Local Plan.

N.B. Following the conclusion of this item, there was a break in proceedings and the meeting reconvened at 21.10.

19 **ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE 2024-25**

Audio recording – 1 hour 41 minutes 10 seconds

Councillor Alistair Willoughby, as Chair of the Standards Committee 2024/25, presented the report entitled 'Annual Report of the Standards Committee 2024-25' and highlighted that:

- A highlight this year had been the adoption of a Corporate Code of Conduct for statutory officers at the Council.
- Councillor standards had been national news this year and it was good to see that these standards were upheld at the Council.
- The system relied on good standards from Councillors to ensure there was public trust and that a system was in place to hold Councillors to account where good standards were not followed.
- He was thankful to all Members, Independent Persons, Reserve Independent Persons, Co-Optees and Officers for their work over the last civic year, especially to the Monitoring Officer.
- He looked forward to working with the newly appointed Monitoring Officer in the coming years.

Councillor Alistair Willoughby proposed and Councillor Ian Albert seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Council received and noted the Annual Report.

REASON FOR DECISION: In line with recommended good governance practice to report the work of Standards Committee to the full Membership, to promote and maintain high standards of conduct and to demonstrate a strong commitment to ethical values.

The meeting closed at 9.15 pm

Chair