

## 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, 29th January, 2026 at 7.30 pm

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

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Shelley Abel (Electoral Services Manager), Isabelle Alajooz (Director - Governance and Monitoring Officer), Ian Couper (Director - Resources), Robert Filby (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Natasha Jindal (Interim Legal Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer), Susan Le Dain (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Anthony Roche (Chief Executive) and Melanie Stimpson (Democratic Services Manager).

**ALSO PRESENT:**

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

#### 66 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

*Audio recording – 1 minute 49 seconds*

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sean Prendergast, Lisa Nash, Clare Billing, Dominic Griffiths and Bryony May.

#### 67 MINUTES - 4 DECEMBER 2025

*Audio Recording – 2 minutes 44 seconds*

Councillor Keith Hoskins, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Sadie Billing seconded and it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 4 December 2025 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

*N.B. Councillors David Barnard and Steven Patmore entered the Chamber at 19:33.*

#### 68 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

*Audio recording – 3 minutes 42 seconds*

There was no other business notified.

## 69 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

*Audio recording – 3 minutes 45 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 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 did not apply to this meeting. A comfort break would be held at an appropriate time, should proceedings continue at length.

*N.B. Councillor Sam Collins entered the Chamber at 19:35.*

## 70 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

*Audio recording – 6 minutes 23 seconds*

There was no public participation.

## 71 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

*Audio recording – 6 minutes 26 seconds*

The Chair advised that the items referred from the Standards Committee, the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee and Cabinet would be taken with the respective items on the agenda.

## 72 SECOND QUARTER TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW 2025/26

*Audio recording – 6 minutes 59 seconds*

*N.B. Councillor Paul Ward declared an interest due to his employment and left the Chamber for the duration of the item.*

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Resources presented the referral from Cabinet and the report entitled 'Second Quarter Treasury Management Review 2025/26' and advised that:

- This report provided an update on the investment of surplus cash.
- It was positive to note that the investment returns had increased to nearly £2M.
- Estimates for 2026/27 would be reviewed as part of the budget setting process.
- This report highlighted a breach of the treasury strategy and the extra control put in place to ensure this would not happen again.
- Details of total interest earned to date was highlighted in paragraph 8.3 of the report.
- The percentage split of investments was set out in a table in paragraph 8.4 of the report.

- Full details of investments including risks and credit ratings were detailed in paragraph 8.5 of the report.
- Following a motion from Council, a meeting had now taken place with the Council's treasury management adviser and an outcome report would be provided to Cabinet and Council as part of the Investment Strategy for 2026/27.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Val Bryant seconded and, following a vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That Council noted the position of Treasury Management activity as at the end of September 2025.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** 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.

*N.B. Councillor Paul Ward returned to the Chamber at 19.40.*

### 73 UPDATED FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

*Audio recording – 10 minutes 45 seconds*

The Director – Resources presented the referral from Finance, Audit and Risk Committee and the report entitled 'Updated Financial Regulations' and advised that:

- This was a slightly overdue report on the updated financial regulations of the Council.
- The proposed schedule of changes and the reasons for the changes was set out in Appendix A. The schedule had track changes to show where the changes had been made.
- There had been some good discussions at the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee meeting around the changes.
- One of the recommendations that had been made by the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee had not been adopted and the reason why this had not been possible to reflect was detailed in paragraph 5.4 of the report.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Val Bryant seconded and, following a vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That Council agreed to the adoption of the Financial Regulations as per Appendix A.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** Due to the passage of time since the last major review of the Financial Regulations, it was considered appropriate to carry out a full review. The proposed changes are detailed in Appendix A alongside the reasons for them.

### 74 THE COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME (EFFECTIVENESS AND PROPOSALS FOR 2026/27)

*Audio recording – 12 minutes 50 seconds*

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Resources presented the referral from Cabinet and the report entitled 'The Council Tax Reduction Scheme (Effectiveness and Proposals for 2026/27)' and advised that:

- This report was seeking approval of the changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) for 2026/27, including changes to the discretionary policy.
- This had been incorporated into the wider report requested by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in relation to the effectiveness of the CTRS.

- This scheme worked well. It was affordable and ensured that the poorest residents did not pay any Council Tax.
- The actions from the Marie Curie campaign that local authorities could take to prevent residents from dying in poverty were set out in paragraph 8.14 of the report.
- As the CTRS already ensured that the poorest residents did not pay any Council Tax, this support would be best covered by an additional to the discretionary policy.
- Inflationary uplifts to Council Tax bands of 6% in line with inflation, were referenced in paragraph 8.19 of the report.
- As the increase to Universal Credit had not been confirmed, the Council would need to wait to ensure the final modelling had the desired outcome.
- An addition to the wording of recommendation 2.2 was proposed to delegate authority to the Director – Resources in consultation with the Executive Member for Resources to make any inflationary changes to the CTRS bands.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed as amended and Councillor Sean Nolan seconded and, following a vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That Council:

- (1) Amended the Council Tax discretionary policy to include the support provided to residents with a terminal illness, with the wording detailed in paragraph 8.17.
- (2) Approved changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme bands to reflect the impact of inflation and delegated a decision on those increases to the Director – Resources in consultation with the Executive Member for Resources.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To respond to the request from Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and to consider changes for next year.

## 75 ELECTORAL SERVICES - SCALE OF FEES 2026/27

*Audio recording – 18 minutes 2 seconds*

*N.B. The Democratic Services Manager and the Director – Governance declared an interest in this item as the Returning Officer and the Deputy Returning Officer and left the Chamber for the duration of the item.*

The Director – Resources presented the report entitled 'Electoral Services – Scale of Fees 2026/27' and advised that:

- The proposed changes to the scale of fees were set out in paragraphs 8.4-8.8 of the report.
- The main change was to ensure that roles were continued to be paid in line with the National Living Wage.
- Full details of the scale of fees were set out in Appendix A.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Val Bryant seconded and, following a vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the Council agreed the Scale of Fees for 2026/27 as set out in Appendix A.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To enable the Council to remunerate the Returning Officer and the staff employed to carry out tasks during electoral events and to be open and transparent regarding other payments.

*N.B. The Democratic Services Manager and Director – Governance returned to the Chamber at 19:50.*

## 76 INTERIM REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICT, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS

*Audio recording 19 minutes 59 seconds*

The Electoral Services Manager presented the report entitled 'Interim Review of Polling District, Polling Places and Polling Stations' and advised that:

- Following completion of the Community Governance Review (CGR) in 2025, the Council was required to undertake an interim Polling District Review.
- An interim review followed the same process as a statutory polling district and polling places review and included a public consultation period.
- The consultation period ran between 14 October 2025 to 30 November 2025 and a total of 20 responses were received as summarised in Appendix B.
- Consideration of the suitability of a polling place included accessibility, parking and transport links, as detailed in Appendix A.
- Details of amendments were set out in paragraph 8.6 of the report as well as in detail in Appendix A.
- Electors in the new polling district of Lavender Grange, which was part of Ickleford parish would continue to vote at Ickleford Village Hall.
- The Council had applied to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to participate in the forthcoming flexible voting election pilots.
- In preparation, it was planned to have voting hubs located in Codicote, Knebworth, Kimpton and Royston if the elections were contested.
- If the election pilots went ahead, electors would be able to vote early in person on Saturday 2 May and Sunday 3 May at Voting Hubs.

In response to a question from Councillor Ralph Muncer, the Democratic Services Manager advised that early voting would be applied for any scheduled parish election or any unscheduled parish or district election on 7 May 2026.

In response to a question from Councillor Jon Clayden, the Electoral Services Manager advised that the change in the polling district boundary line affecting the dwellings in Billing Place, Hitchin was detailed in the map in Appendix B. These changes were being made to ensure that voters in these dwellings could vote at their closest polling station.

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

**RESOLVED:** That Council designated the Polling Districts and Polling Places as per the Returning Officer's Proposals attached as Appendix A to the submitted report, effective as of 2 March 2026.

### **REASONS FOR DECISION:**

- (1) The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places, which had to be concluded by 31 January 2025.
- (2) Outside of compulsory reviews, the (Acting) Returning Officer (RO) for each authority is also encouraged to conduct regular assessments of existing arrangements. Following completion of the Community Governance Review (CGR) 2025 which resulted in changes to parish wards – specifically in Ickleford, Baldock, Royston, Clothall and Bygrave. Therefore, the polling arrangements were required to be considered.

## 77 APPOINTMENT OF REPLACEMENT RESERVE INDEPENDENT PERSON

*Audio recording – 25 minutes 41 seconds*

Councillor Daniel Allen, as Executive Member for Governance presented the report entitled 'Appointment of Reserve Independent Person' and advised that:

- This report requested approval from Council to appoint a Reserve Replacement Independent Person following the resignation of the current Reserve Independent Person.
- Approval was sought to appoint Joel Rogers from 29 January 2026 for a fixed term period of up to 4 years.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Sean Nolan seconded and, following a vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That Council:

- (1) Appointed Joel Rogers as Reserve Independent Person;

such appointments/ confirmation of continuing appointments under 2.1 be for a fixed term of up to 4 years from 29 January 2026, based on 2-years, with delegation to the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Standards Committee to extend for a further 2 years.

- (2) Delegated to the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Standards Committee, the decision (if the current Independent Person decides within term to resign/ unable to act/ no longer qualifies), to appoint one of the existing Reserve Independent Persons as the Independent Person and/ or to undertake any further recruitment, as may be required.

**REASON FOR DECISIONS:** To ensure that the Council's Standards processes can operate in accordance with legislative requirements if one or both Independent Person and Reserve Independent Persons are unable to advise on a matter. This should also allow for a degree of succession planning/ training whilst experienced persons are in place.

## 78 ADOPTION OF UPDATED GUIDANCE TO COUNCILLORS ON OUTSIDE BODIES

*Audio recording – 28 minutes 34 seconds*

Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham, as Chair of the Standards Committee, presented the referral from Standards Committee and the report entitled 'Adoption of Updated Guidance to Councillors on Outside Bodies' and advised that:

- The last time the guidance to Councillors on Outside Bodies was updated was 2016.
- There had been a late amendment to the report to change the word 'company' to 'organisation' in paragraph 8.8 of the report.
- No fundamental changes had been made to the approach adopted by the Council and the update was to make the document easier for Members to read.
- The initial part of the guidance had been updated to reflect the three most common types of outside body, as detailed in paragraph 8.5 of the report and point 2 of the guidance.
- Details of any conflicts of interest that Councillors needed to be aware of was detailed in paragraphs 8.7 and 8.8 of the report.
- Members could always seek guidance from the Monitoring Officer as detailed in points 7 and 8 of the guidance.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Matt Barnes

In response to questions, Cllr Poopalasingham advised that the report had originally said 'company' instead of 'organisation' in paragraph 8.8 of the report.

In response to questions, the Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that:

- The word 'company' had been changed to 'organisation' in the last bullet point of paragraph 8.8 on page 181 of the published agenda.
- Paragraph 8.8 of the report also applied to Section 6 of the guidance to Councillors on Outside Bodies.

In response to a question, the Monitoring Officer advised that Members were covered by an Indemnity Policy, which was available on The Hub for Members to view.

Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham proposed and Councillor Ian Albert seconded and, following a vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That Council approved and adopted the updated guidance for Councillors.

**REASONS FOR DECISION:**

- (1) The Council's current guidance to Councillors on Outside Bodies was last updated in 2016.
- (2) A full review of the guidance to Councillors on outside bodies has been necessary to ensure:
  - Councillors are aware of their liabilities based on the type of organisation which they are appointed to and the risks associated with these appointments both to the Councillor and the Council.
  - That the guidance available to Councillors aligns with the updated statutory position and also best practice.

**79 ADOPTION OF THE MONITORING OFFICER PROTOCOL**

*Audio recording – 37 minutes 27 seconds*

Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham, as Chair of the Standards Committee, presented the referral from Standards Committee and the report entitled 'Adoption of the Monitoring Officer Protocol' and advised that:

- This report was to provide Members with a proposed Monitoring Officer protocol and for Members to note the recent guidance document on the Golden Triangle.
- The emphasis on good governance has been heightened as an increased number of local authorities have found themselves in financial difficulties.
- The Monitoring Officer role was a statutory role as highlighted in paragraph 8.1 of the report.
- It was the obligation of the Monitoring Officer to report if the Council made a proposal or decision that could be illegal, improper or to constitute maladministration, as set out in Section 2 and 3 of the guidance at Appendix A.
- The protocol explained the legal requirements and set out the arrangements in place to manage maladministration as detailed in paragraph 8.6 of the report.
- The Monitoring Officer should be proactive in decision making, as highlighted in Section 3 of the guidance.
- The Monitoring Officer could act to resolve matters informally as set out in paragraphs 8.8 and 8.9 of the report.

- The Monitoring Officer was a very important role to ensure the Council operated to high standards.

Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham proposed and Councillor Sean Nolan seconded and, following a vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That Council:

- (1) Approved and adopted the Monitoring Officer Protocol into the Constitution.
- (2) Noted the guidance attached at Appendix 2 titled: The Golden Triangle: Governance Roles and Responsibilities.

**REASONS FOR DECISIONS:**

- (1) The role of the Monitoring Officer has expanded over recent years. Monitoring Officers are also required to act as consultants to anyone within the Council on matters of legality, maladministration, and impropriety.
- (2) It is therefore considered that it would be good practice for the Council to introduce an appropriate Protocol.
- (3) In August 2025, Lawyers in Local Government (LLG), the Chartered Institute for Public Finance & Accountancy (CIPFA) and the Society for Local Authority Chief Executives & Senior Managers (SOLACE) collaborated to produce a new guide: 'The Golden Triangle: Governance Roles and Responsibilities' (attached at Appendix 2). Members are invited to give consideration to this guidance to enhance their overall understanding of the interwoven nature of the roles of the three statutory officers within the Council.

**80 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE, MEMBER, CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR OF THE FINANCE, AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE (AND NOTING THE APPOINTMENT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER OF COUNCIL, APPOINTMENT OF A NEW EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AND APPOINTMENT TO OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS)**

*Audio recording – 43 minutes 2 seconds*

The Democratic Services Manager presented the report entitled 'Appointment of a Substitute, Member, Chair and Vice Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee' as published.

Following a question from Councillor Claire Strong, Councillor Val Bryant advised that the Special Interest Member Champion for Health vacancy would remain vacant for the remainder of the civic year.

Following a question from Councillor Claire Strong, the Democratic Services Manager advised that whilst there would be an extra Executive Member of Cabinet, there would not be any extra financial implications. This was because the Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) for the Executive Member for Customer Experience role would be received by Cllr Sean Nolan instead of Councillor Val Bryant who was vacating that position.

The Chair advised that a separate vote would be taken for each of the recommendations.

Councillor Val Bryant proposed and Councillor Nigel Mason seconded, and it was:

**RESOLVED:** That for the remainder of the 2025/26 civic year Council appointed Members to the following vacancies on the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee:

- Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason be appointed as a Member of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee to the vacant seat on the Labour and Co-Operative Group.
- Councillor David Barnard be appointed as a Substitute Member of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee to the vacant seat on the Conservative Group.

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

**RESOLVED:** That Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham be appointed as the Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee for the remainder of the 2025/26 civic year.

Councillor Val Bryant proposed and Councillor Emma Fernandes seconded, and it was:

**RESOLVED:** That Councillor Sarah Lucas be appointed as the Vice-Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee for the remainder of the 2025/26 civic year.

Councillor Val Bryant proposed and Councillor Nigel Mason seconded, and it was:

**RESOLVED:** That Council noted the appointment of Councillor Sean Nolan as the Executive Member for Customer Experience and Deputy Leader for the remainder of the 2025/26 civic year.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Nigel Mason seconded, and it was:

**RESOLVED:** That Council noted the appointment of Councillor Val Bryant as Member Representative and Councillor Sean Nolan as reserve Member Representative on the Outside Organisations 'Herts Leaders Group' and 'East of England Leaders Group'.

**REASON FOR DECISIONS:** To comply with the provisions of 4.8.1 (a) (vii), (viii) and (ix) of the Council's Constitution following Councillor Sean Nolan resigning from the Committee / position of Chair of Finance, Audit and Risk Committee and appointment as the Deputy Leader / Executive Member for Customer Experience.

## 81 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

*Audio recording – 51 minutes 40 seconds*

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

### **(A) Support for Compassionate Neighbours Scheme and Other Schemes**

Councillor Jon Clayden to Councillor Daniel Allen (Executive Member for Governance):

'The sadly precarious financial position that Garden House Hospice Care finds itself in has recently led to the short-notice closure of the North Herts Compassionate Neighbours scheme. This scheme provided very much-needed support and companionship to many residents across our district, including to an elderly man in my ward who wrote to tell me how important it had been to him since the death of his wife. Could the Executive Member please update this council on the future of these schemes in North Herts, including any help the council is planning to provide?'

Councillor Daniel Allen provided the following response:

'Thank you, Cllr Clayden, for raising this important issue. I completely understand how upsetting the closure of the Compassionate Neighbours Scheme has been for residents who have relied on it and for the families that saw the difference that it made. It provided real companionship and reassurance for people who were often at their most vulnerable. As the scheme was established by an external organisation, the Council cannot determine the future of the service or replace the service. Our officers have been engaging and will continue to engage with Garden House Hospice to understand the changes that have been made. The Council has also shared information with community groups about alternative sources of support, including local voluntary organisation, Community Forums and relevant grant and locality funding routes where appropriate. While we cannot step in, North Herts Council remains committed to working with partners and community organisations to help ensure residents area supported within our powers and available resources.'

Councillor Jon Clayden asked a supplementary question, as follows:

'I would like to know whether there is anything this Council could do to enable people to have access to a similar scheme? It has been a lifeline for those who have been depending on it.'

Councillor Daniel Allen responded:

'Thank you. We would encourage that anyone speak with the Community team to help them. I was going to say that we would do our best to help, but I cannot because I don't know what is being asked of us, but I am going to say that this is a really vital service that does much to help.'

**(B) 'Protection of the Romano-British small town and Late Iron Age settlement at Baldock**

Councillor Sam Collins to Councillor Donna Wright (Executive Member for Place):

"The Late Iron age and Romano-British town at Baldock has been placed on the at-risk register by Historic England who state that the site has major problems, has high vulnerability and is declining. Historic England has also highlighted that there is no action or strategy identified or agreed to protect this site of national importance. What is the administration doing to protect this nationally important historic site?"

Councillor Donna Wright provided the following response:

'The historic settlement at Baldock has been on Historic England's risk register since 2016. Much of the settlement is beneath the area known locally as Walls Field and has been farmed for many years.

The Masterplan for the Growing Baldock project was approved by Council in June 2025. It says that Walls Field will be taken out of agricultural use to provide a new public open space and this will focus on natural grassland and biodiversity. This lower intensity of use will reduce the pressure on the Scheduled Ancient Monument.

An outline planning application is currently being considered and Historic England's response to the application is available on our website. This says that the end of ploughing impacts and appropriate future management would likely result in the site being taken off the 'at risk' register.'

Councillor Sam Collins asked a supplementary question, as follows:

‘Historic England’s guidance states that local planning authorities should have the ability to assess heritage assets within the local heritage list. These local heritage lists, if the officers have delegated authority to add sites, what is the procedure to add sites to the list and how do members of the public have access to those lists?’

Councillor Donna Wright responded:

‘I don’t know what that procedure is and I will have to check with officers. We have begun discussions with urban and civic as part of the planning process and the masterplan will ensure we have a broad strategy and that is the main point with this site. I will have to get back to Cllr Collins on the process he mentions.’

## 82 NOTICE OF MOTIONS

*Audio recording – 56 minutes 35 seconds*

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

*N.B. Councillors Claire Strong, Martin Prescott and Daniel Allen declared an interest in this item due to their position as Members and substitutes of the Planning Control Committee and left the Chamber for the duration of this item.*

*N.B. Councillor Emma Rowe declared an interest in this item due to her employment and left the Chamber for the duration of the item.*

*N.B. Councillors Nigel Mason and Emma Fernandes declared an interest in this item due to their positions as Chair and Vice-Chair of the Planning Control Committee and advised they would not take part in the debate or vote on the motion but would remain in the Chamber.*

In response to a question from Councillor Val Bryant, the Monitoring Officer explained that the motion related to planning policy at a high level, and it did not prevent Members of the Planning Control Committee from taking part, however, they should be careful when expressing views and have an open mind when considering applications at Committee.

### **(A) ‘Grey Belt’ Land and Planning Applications in North Herts**

Councillor Louise Peace proposed the motions as follows:

‘Changes to the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework) in December 2024 introduced a new concept in planning: grey belt. “For the purposes of plan-making and decision-making, ‘grey belt’ is defined as land in the green belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143.”

Villages in North Herts now find that surrounding ‘green belt’ land can be considered as ‘grey belt’ as (a), (b) and (d) in paragraph 143 of the 2024 NPPF made no reference to villages – only that neighbouring towns should not merge into one another and it should ‘...preserve the setting and special character of historic towns’. Proposed revisions to the NPPF, currently at consultation stage, go further than this with (a) and (b) clearly stating that villages should not be included in these considerations. Provided that certain ‘golden rules’ are followed such as the provision of 50% ‘affordable’ housing, applications can now be made on green belt land that would previously have been untenable.

The result of this in Ickleford, in my ward of Cadwell, is that some 350 homes are currently under consideration or at pre-application stage on undeveloped edge of village green field sites with another approximately 50 homes on the border of neighbouring Bearton ward. North Hertfordshire needs new homes, but it needs to be able to build these homes where there is infrastructure available to support residents. Residents deserve readily available NHS services, good public transport options including safe walking and cycling access to employment and homes where the sewerage network isn't already at capacity. Large developments on edge of village locations result in communities reliant on cars, using roads that are already at a standstill at peak periods.

In December 2025, the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) reported that of 1,250 homes submitted as part of applications on 'grey belt' land, 88% will be built on previously undeveloped countryside. When the policy was introduced, the government gave 'disused petrol stations' and 'abandoned car parks' as examples of sites in the green belt that could be considered 'grey belt' and released for development. Instead, the NPPF is allowing development on unspoilt rural landscapes. The requirement for local authorities to demonstrate a five-year land supply (also introduced in the 2024 NPPF) further reduces the protection for green field habitat as the 'tilted balance' in favour of development significantly raises the bar to demonstrate harms.

The Institute for Public Policy Research published research in 2025 that showed up to 1.4 million homes have been granted planning permission, but left unbuilt by developers since 2007, and commented "This is not about pitting NIMBYs against YIMBYs, it is about ensuring the government achieves its ambitious targets whilst also maintaining local support and high quality." That is also the purpose of this motion.

Therefore, Council resolves:

That the Executive Member for Place:

- (1) Writes to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to express concern about the rise of speculative development in the countryside in North Herts.
- (2) Responds to the consultation on proposed changes to the NPPF by 10 March 2026, including the following points:
  - Green belt assessment should include villages.
  - Ensure grey belt developments occur only on previously developed land
  - Ensure high-quality farmland and important wildlife habitats are protected from development.
  - Set ambitious and legally binding targets for genuinely affordable and socially rented homes in all new developments, with developers held to account if they are not delivered.

Councillor Ruth Brown seconded the motion.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Caroline McDonnell
- Councillor Donna Wright
- Councillor David Barnard
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Joe Graziano
- Councillor Daniel Wright Mason
- Councillor Steve Jarvis
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor Sam Collins

Points raised during the debate included:

- This motion highlighted the risk to the green belt as villages were being overdeveloped.
- The Council needed to find more brown sites for housing development.
- The introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) had created challenges to planning.
- Ickleford was a small community which was suffering from over development.
- The Council needed to remain cautious with directing housing growth.
- If the Council did not build on grey belt, it would not meet housing requirements.
- The Council should apply to the government for extra funding for housing.
- Local villages were being overdeveloped leading to urban sprawl.
- The right infrastructure needed to be in place before any housing development could happen.
- The Council did need to provide affordable housing for young people within the district, but this must be in the right places.
- Further clarity was needed on the definition of the grey belt.
- Residents have accepted that the major sites in the Local Plan would be built.
- The Council did not have enough land supply to limit grey belt development.
- Villages were in risk of becoming towns and needed to keep their rural character.
- There was a lack of concern for the countryside and local wildlife habitats.

Councillor Louise Peace replied to the debate and made the following points:

- She was very pleased that Members supported this motion.
- Members were all in agreement that the Council needed to control housing development levels in the district.
- The green belt had been put in place to prevent urban sprawl.

Having been proposed and seconded and, following a vote, the motion was **CARRIED**.

*N.B. Councillor Cathy Brownjohn left the Chamber at 20:26 and returned at 20:28.*

*N.B. Councillor Mick Debenham left the Chamber at 20:33 and returned at 20:36.*

*N.B. Following this motion there was a break in proceedings and the meeting commenced again at 21:15, at which point Councillors Daniel Allen, Claire Strong and Emma Rowe returned to the Chamber.*

*N.B. During the break Councillors Rhona Cameron and Martin Prescott left the meeting and did not return.*

### **(B) HertsLynx Expansion**

Councillor Ralph Muncer proposed the motion as follows, having accepted the proposed amendments by Councillors Jon Clayden and Tim Johnson published as a supplementary document:

'The HertsLynx was first launched in North and East Herts in September 2021 by the previous Conservative Administration at Hertfordshire County Council in conjunction with North Herts Council, offering residents the opportunity to access more flexible and reliable journeys by bus, as well as enhancing connections and making it easier for people who live in rural communities to access employment, education and healthcare located within key hub towns including Hitchin, Letchworth and Stevenage.

However, despite the service going from strength to strength in recent years with over 5,000 passenger journeys being taken every month and the service having been expanded to Dacorum in December 2023, the rural communities within the Southern Rural area have not yet been able to experience the benefits of this service due to the operating zone not having been expanded to cover them.

It notes that the Liberal Democrat led Hertfordshire County Council has recently successfully obtained funding from the Labour government to support work towards introducing franchised bus services in North Herts, East Herts and Stevenage which could in future result in funding to expand the HertsLynx service to the remainder of the district.'

Therefore, Council resolves:

- (1) To instruct the Leader of the Council to write to the Executive Member for Environment, Transport and Growth at Hertfordshire County Council, urging them, once funding is available, to expand the HertsLynx service to the communities within the Southern Rural area who don't currently enjoy the benefits of this innovative service, as well as to welcome the planned enhancements to the service currently experienced by those living elsewhere in North Herts.
- (2) To instruct Officers to work with Hertfordshire County Council in order to identify the best way North Hertfordshire District Council can encourage and support any proposals for the expansion and service enhancement of the HertsLynx, including investigating any potential financial support from S106 contributions that this Council could offer in order to deliver these ambitions.

Councillor Joe Graziano seconded the amended motion.

Published as a supplementary document to the agenda was a further amendment proposed by Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham, which was withdrawn on the basis that the amendments proposed by the Liberal Democrat group had been incorporated into the motion.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Sam Collins
- Councillor Alistair Willoughby
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Matt Barnes
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Nigel Mason

Points raised during the debate included:

- Hertfordshire County Council was looking to expand bus services to rural areas.
- The original concept for HertsLynx originated from North Herts Council.
- The Council should seek to provide a reliable regular bus service across the whole district to connect communities.
- Although there had been some improvements made to the bus services to villages, there was much more to be achieved.
- The bus service in Royston was very popular and was used in many of the surrounding villages.
- Hertfordshire County Council should seek to improve bus services in North Herts using some of the funds it received from government.

Councillor Ralph Muncer replied to the debate and made the following points:

- He was very pleased to receive support from Members for this motion.
- Although there were some Hertfordshire County Councillors in the Chamber, it should be made clear that this request was being made from North Herts District Council.

Having been proposed as amended, and seconded and, following a vote, the substantive motion was **CARRIED**.

**(C) Action on Fly-tipping**

Councillor Ralph Muncer proposed the motion as follows:

‘Fly-tipping is a blight on our towns and villages which causes damage and pollution to the local environment, endangers public health and results in the perception of an area shifting from one that is looked after and protected to one of neglect and decline.

It’s a crime which incurs significant cost to the taxpayer, with the Hertfordshire Waste Partnership estimating Councils across the county are required to over £1 million every year to clean-up and investigate illegally dumped waste.

Rural communities are also disproportionately impacted by this crime with farmers, who already face increased hardship, often being required to pay thousands of pounds to remove fly-tipped waste from their land, and recently the National Farmers Union estimated the cost of rural crime in Hertfordshire, including fly-tipping, increased to £1.23 million.’

Therefore, Council resolves:

- (1) To use the powers given to local authorities by the previous Conservative Government to increase fixed penalty notices issued by North Hertfordshire District Council for fly-tipping to £1000 as opposed to the current £400 fine.
- (2) To instruct Officers to work on a public information campaign to increase awareness of the SCRAP code, as well as the steps members of public should take to report fly-tipping to the Council.
- (3) To adopt a policy to name offenders who are convicted of fly-tipping in Council Press Releases.’

Councillor Michael Muir seconded the motion.

The Chair advised that there had been two amendments to the motion published in supplementary documents. One proposed by Councillor Mick Debenham and seconded by Councillor Vijaya Poopalasingham and one proposed by Councillor Tom Tyson and seconded by Councillor Caroline McDonnell.

Councillor Mick Debenham advised that he would be happy to accept the amendments proposed by the Liberal Democrat Group, within the amended motion he proposed.

Therefore, Councillor Mick Debenham proposed the amendment as follows:

‘Fly-tipping is a blight on our towns and villages which causes damage and pollution to the local environment, endangers public health and results in the perception of an area shifting from one that is looked after and protected to one of neglect and decline.

It’s a crime which incurs significant cost to the taxpayer, with the Hertfordshire Waste Partnership estimating Councils across the county are required to over £1 million every year to clean-up and investigate illegally dumped waste.

Rural communities are also disproportionately impacted by this crime with farmers, who already face increased hardship, often being required to pay thousands of pounds to remove fly-tipped waste from their land, and recently the National Farmers Union estimated the cost of rural crime in Hertfordshire, including fly-tipping, increased to £1.23 million.

Therefore, Council resolves:

- (1) To use its powers given under the Environmental Protection Act (1990) to issue Fixed Penalty Notices for minor fly tipping offences. In line with the 2023 amendment increasing the maximum fine to £1000, higher penalties will be applied where appropriate.
- (2) To instruct Officers to work on a public information campaign to increase awareness of the SCRAP code, as well as the steps members of public should take to report fly-tipping to the Council.
- (3) To continue to work with the police to tackle the crime of fly-tipping by unauthorised commercial operators and pursue the objective of prosecuting all serious offenders.'

Councillor Vijaya Poopalasingham seconded the amendment to the motion.

The following Members took part in the debate on the amendment:

- Councillor Sean Nolan
- Councillor Michael Muir
- Councillor Tom Tyson
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Alistair Willoughby
- Councillor David Barnard
- Councillor Amy Allen
- Councillor Sam Collins
- Councillor Joe Graziano
- Councillor Ruth Brown

Points raised during the debate included:

- The Council did currently name fly-tipping offenders on the website and in some of the press releases.
- The fine for should be raised to the maximum £1k to stop fly-tipping offenders.
- Sometimes people could be unaware that the rubbish they had paid to be disposed of could end up being fly tipped.
- Increasing fines to £1k would not stop fly-tipping and more work needed to be done with partners to put an end to fly tipping.
- Environmental Enforcement Officers were currently overworked with so many cases of fly-tipping.
- People should ask to see a refuse disposal licence and obtain a receipt when they paid someone to dispose of their rubbish, otherwise they could face being prosecuted.
- Details of the SCRAP code could be found on the Council website.
- Farmers were victims of fly-tipping and the National Farmers Union were having to clear up fly tipping out of their own expenses.
- The current fine of £400 for fly-tipping was less than the price of hiring a skip.
- In addition to promoting the SCRAP code, the Council should be promoting the bulky waste collection service.

In response to points raised in the debate on the amendment, Councillor Ralph Muncer thanked Members for their support for this motion.

**Thursday, 29th January, 2026**

Having been proposed and seconded, and following a vote, the amendment was **CARRIED**.

Having been proposed and seconded and, following a vote, the substantive motion, as amended, was **CARRIED**.

The meeting closed at 10.01 pm

Chair