

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, 23rd April, 2026 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors: Keith Hoskins MBE (Chair), Sadie Billing (Vice-Chair), Clare Billing, Tina Bhartwas, Ian Albert, Matt Barnes, Ruth Brown, David Chalmers, Jon Clayden, Ruth Clifton, Sam Collins, Mick Debenham, Elizabeth Dennis, Emma Fernandes, Dominic Griffiths, Steve Jarvis, Tim Johnson, Chris Lucas, Ian Mantle, Nigel Mason, Bryony May, Caroline McDonnell, Ralph Muncer, Sean Nolan, Steven Patmore, Louise Peace, Vijaiya Poopalasingham, Sean Prendergast, 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: Isabelle Alajooz (Director - Governance and Monitoring Officer), Faith Churchill (PA - Director Governance), Jamie Graham (Democratic Services Apprentice), 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 1 member of the public was in attendance.

95 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 32 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Val Bryant, Lisa Nash, Daniel Allen, Sarah Lucas, Cathy Brownjohn, Joe Graziano, Rhona Cameron, Michael Muir and David Barnard.

96 MINUTES - 13 JANUARY AND 26 FEBRUARY 2026

Audio recording – 2 minutes 5 seconds

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

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meetings of the Committee held on 13 January 2026 and 26 February 2026 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

97 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 51 seconds

There was no other business notified.

98 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 55 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.
- (6) The Chair reminded Members of Members Development Week to cover training and the sessions arranged during Monday 11 May and Thursday 14 May 2026 to cover required and compulsory training.
- (7) The Chair asked Members to ensure they could successfully log in to their IT equipment ahead of the training sessions being held in Members Development Week.
- (8) The Chair reminded Members that the Council was piloting flexible voting in Royston at the upcoming elections on 7 May 2026 which meant that votes could be cast at any Hub on Saturday 2 May and Sunday 3 May 2026 between 10am to 3pm.

99 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 5 minutes 56 seconds

There was no public participation.

100 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Audio recording – 5 minutes 59 seconds

The Chair advised that there were no items referred from other Committees to consider.

101 ADOPTION OF THE PLANNING CONTROL COMMITTEE ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE

Audio recording – 6 minutes 9 seconds

The Chair advised that this item had been **DEFERRED** to a future meeting of Council to allow for further consultation.

102 **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS**

Audio recording – 6 minutes 29 seconds

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

(A) Greater Cambridge Development Corporation

Councillor Matt Barnes to Councillor Donna Wright (Executive Member for Place):

“Could the Executive Member for Place please outline the Council’s response, as a neighbouring authority, to the recent consultation concerning the creation of a Greater Cambridge Development Corporation - which the Government proposes would take control of planning and infrastructure across Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire?”

Councillor Donna Wright provided the following response:

“Officers reviewed the consultation material but did not submit a formal response. To put into context any Development Corporation would not take on planning-making powers until the Greater Cambridge Plan is adopted which is not expected before late 2027. Any future plan-making by a development corporation would be a matter for future unitary authorities in Hertfordshire. Furthermore, development management powers would be limited to strategic scale proposals which are focused around Cambridge. There are no current strategic proposals near North Hert’s boundaries, so our connection with South Cambs is less vital than with other areas at the moment. However, officers do maintain regular contact with Greater Cambridgeshire colleagues with regular updates reported through the Strategic Planning Matters report that goes to Cabinet. In this context and given other service pressures and priorities, a formal response was not considered necessary. We have actually been inundated with consultations this year. I should add that no queries or concerns were raised by Members during the consultation period and no requests were made for a response, briefing note or anything else. I suggest that if Councillor Barnes has concerns that he approaches the Leader of the South Cambridge District Council, Councillor Bridget Smith to discuss these.”

Councillor Matt Barnes asked a supplementary question as follows:

“Given that how will the Council’s planning team ensure that necessary infrastructure investment is afforded to Royston and the neighbouring villages as these developments come forward and in particular the proposal for 1400 homes just across the A505 which was on the front page of the Royston Chronical or featured very heavily in the Royston Chronical recently.”

Councillor Donna Wright responded:

“I think that this will be a decision for a future unitary authority.”

N.B. Councillor Dominic Griffiths entered the Chamber at 19:41.

103 NOTICE OF MOTIONS

Audio recording – 9 minutes 56 seconds

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

(A) Verge and Footway Parking Protection Orders in Letchworth Garden City

Councillor Sean Prendergast proposed the following motion with the addition of the words 'in North Hertfordshire' at the end of the first recommendation:

Letchworth Garden City, as the world's first Garden City, was designed with wide grass verges and green spaces as a defining feature of the town.

In a number of locations, grass verges are being damaged by repeated vehicle parking, with vehicles often mounting both verges and adjoining footways.

This behaviour can also obstruct footways and narrow pedestrian routes, creating particular difficulties for people with disabilities, wheelchair and mobility scooter users, parents with pushchairs, and older residents who rely on clear and accessible pavements and verges.

Protecting these verges and footways is therefore important not only to preserving the heritage, character and environmental quality of the Garden City, but also to ensuring that streets remain safe and accessible for all residents.

Verge and footway protection orders have successfully been implemented in Welwyn Garden City through the Traffic Regulation Order process.

Therefore, Council resolves to:

- (1) Ask officers to identify suitable locations where verge and footway protection orders could help prevent damage caused by vehicles mounting and parking on grass verges and pavements and improve accessibility for pedestrians in North Hertfordshire.
- (2) Request that North Hertfordshire District Council, working with Hertfordshire County Council bring forward proposals for the introduction of verge and footway protection orders through the Traffic Regulation Order process in appropriate locations within Letchworth Garden City, with the flexibility to include multiple streets where verge damage is occurring.
- (3) Ensure that any proposals are subject to appropriate consultation with residents. To report back to Members with proposals for implementation.

Councillor Tina Bhartwas seconded the motion.

The Chair advised that there had been one amendment to the motion published in a supplementary document proposed by Councillor Alistair Willoughby and seconded by Councillor Clare Billing.

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

- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Claire Winchester
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Donna Wright
- Councillor Sean Nolan
- Councillor David Chalmers

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Laura Williams
- Councillor Sadie Billing
- Councillor Nigel Mason
- Councillor Steve Jarvis

Points raised during the debate on the amendment included:

- Whether the Council had the necessary resources available to implement the motion.
- The Council should try to implement this as soon as possible and not wait for a law to be introduced by government which might never happen.
- Any parking dangers should be reported to the police who would take the necessary action to resolve matters.
- It would be sensible for the Council to ensure it had a consistent approach across the whole of the district.
- Residents were having to take matters into their own hands by putting boulders across grass verges to stop delivery vans from parking which was detrimental to the appearance of Letchworth.
- The motion should be amended to ensure that all residents across North Hertfordshire were treated equally.
- This was an issue that affected the whole district which needed to be properly addressed.

In response to a point in the debate, the Monitoring Officer advised that full consideration of any financial and resources implications for the Council would be undertaken by officers before any motion was implemented.

Councillor Sean Prendergast replied to the debate and made the following points:

- He could not support the amendments as they fundamentally altered the motion.
- The original motion was targeted, proportionate and focused.

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

Councillor Ralph Muncer proposed an amendment to the motion that the words 'and other communities across North Hertfordshire' be added after 'Letchworth Garden City' in the second recommendation which was seconded by Councillor Martin Prescott.

The following Members took part in a debate on the amended motion:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor David Chalmers
- Councillor Alistair Willoughby
- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Ian Albert

Points raised during the debate on the amended motion included:

- The additional wording would ensure that the other areas in North Hertfordshire were included, and it would mean implementation could happen sooner.
- A decision needed to be made now to ensure protection of the grass verges before winter and the return of bad weather.
- Funding should be spent across the whole district and not solely on one town.
- This amendment would ensure the process was looked at properly across the whole of North Hertfordshire.

Councillor Sean Prendergast advised that he was happy to accept the additional wording proposed by Councillor Muncer.

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

(B) Protection of North Herts Chalk Streams

Councillor Tom Tyson proposed the motion as follows:

Chalk streams are globally rare ecosystems that require our protection. There are only around 260 chalk streams in the world, with 85% of them being in southern England. We have ten in North Herts and it behoves us to offer these precious and vulnerable assets the maximum level of protection against over-abstraction and pollution, particularly in the face of huge potential levels of housing development locally.

South Cambs MP Pippa Heylings is currently sponsoring a Chalk Streams (UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site) Bill in parliament. Our MP for NE Herts Chris Hinchliff is a signatory. The bill seeks to give our chalk streams status as a serial UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site, which requires the government to make a national commitment to their conservation. However, the status could take years to achieve.

At a time when the government is pushing to enable housing development to take place more rapidly and with less local control than ever before, it is essential that North Herts Council does everything possible to protect its unique chalk streams and the irreplaceable habitats associated with them.

The draft NPPF (2025) now makes two mentions of the need to protect chalk streams – in policies P3 2(e) and N1 1(a) – but this protection must also be embedded at the local level.

The new North Herts Local Plan currently under development offers an opportunity to do this. The presence of our chalk streams should be woven into the visions and objectives of the Local Plan.

Whilst only part of North Herts lies within the Chilterns National Landscape, the Planning Guidance set out for it by the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project is equally valid for the whole of North Herts. This should be applied across the District and its plan-making checklist be implemented in development of the new North Herts Local Plan.

Therefore, Council resolves to:

- (1) Instruct the Executive Member for Place to write to MPs Pippa Heylings and Chris Hinchliff expressing the Council's support for the Bill to make all UK chalk streams a serial UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site.
- (2) Ensure the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project checklist with the two amendments shown is adopted and applied throughout the preparation of the Council's new Local Plan.
- (3) Ensure that the Council as LPA places the highest possible priority on the protection and conservation of the District's chalk streams, taking appropriate measures to safeguard their ecological integrity and the quality and quantity of their water, including the imposition of planning conditions as necessary.

Councillor Louise Peace seconded the motion.

The Chair advised that there had been one amendment to the motion published in a supplementary document proposed by Councillor Donna Wright and seconded by Councillor Emma Fernandes.

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

- Councillor Sean Nolan
- Councillor Tom Tyson
- Councillor Alistair Willoughby
- Councillor Sam Collins

Points raised during the debate on the amendment included:

- The over extraction of water from chalk streams by water companies must be stopped.
- The correct balance between increasing the housing supply and the protection of nature had to be obtained.
- Chalk streams were quite unique across the district and were something that need protection.

Councillor Tom Tyson replied to the debate and made the following points:

- Agreed to include point 7 within the motion.
- 'The over-abstraction of our rare chalk streams is a serious and long-standing concern. Water companies have consistently under-invested in the infrastructure and new reservoir capacity needed to support a growing population, and this failure has placed significant pressure on our local water environment. Several of our community groups – including Revlvel, Friends of Oughtonhead Common, and the River Hiz Conservation Group– have done exceptional work to highlight the impact this has had on our chalk streams and to champion their protection.'
- Did not agree to the amendment to point 3 as it was not grammatical and did not have any point to it.
- Did not agree to the addition of the names of two further MP's in the first recommendation as they had not had any involvement with the Bill.

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

Councillor Ralph Muncer proposed amendments to point 6 of the motion and the addition of a further point to include the effect of the toxic levels of PFAS (forever chemicals) from Luton Airport. This was seconded by Councillor Steven Patmore.

Following a question from Councillor Ian Albert, the Monitoring Officer advised that these amendments would not negate the original motion.

The following Members took part in the debate on the amended motion:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Laura Williams
- Councillor Clare Billing
- Councillor Sean Nolan
- Councillor Dave Winstanley
- Councillor Alistair Willoughby
- Councillor Sam Collins
- Councillor Donna Wright
- Councillor Martin Prescott

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Point raised during the debate on the amended motion included:

- The Council was fortunate to have so many chalk streams in North Hertfordshire.
- The whole infrastructure of chalk streams needed to be reviewed including the wash streams that fed into the chalk streams.
- Members needed to do all they could to protect chalk streams which were a vital asset to the district.
- Members would need more time to consider the amendments and could not absorb all this verbal information without seeing it written down.
- Members would like to be provided with sources of information regarding PFAS levels and be able to look at the statistics properly.
- Councillor Muncer should withdraw his amendments and bring this as a motion to Council at a future meeting.

Councillor Muncer agreed to withdraw the amendments to the motion and to present to a future meeting of Council.

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

N.B. Councillor Steven Patmore left the Chamber at 20:20 and returned at 20:23.

The meeting closed at 8.58 pm

Chair