

**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**



15 April 2026

Our Ref Council 23 April 2026  
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To: The Chair and Members of North Hertfordshire District Council

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN OF A**

**MEETING OF THE COUNCIL**

to be held in the

**COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERNO  
N ROAD, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY, SG6 3JF**

on

**THURSDAY, 23RD APRIL, 2026**

at

**7.30 PM**

Yours sincerely,

Isabelle Alajooz  
Director – Governance

**\*\*MEMBERS PLEASE ENSURE THAT YOU DOWNLOAD ALL AGENDAS AND REPORTS VIA THE MOD.GOV APPLICATION ON YOUR TABLET BEFORE ATTENDING THE MEETING\*\***

## **Agenda** **Part I**

<b>Item</b>		<b>Page</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b>	
<b>2.</b>	<b>MINUTES - 13 JANUARY AND 26 FEBRUARY 2026</b> To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 13 January and 26 February 2026.	5 - 26
<b>3.</b>	<b>NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS</b> Members should notify the Chair of other business which they wish to be discussed at the end of either Part I or Part II business set out in the agenda. They must state the circumstances which they consider justify the business being considered as a matter of urgency.  The Chair will decide whether any item(s) raised will be considered.	
<b>4.</b>	<b>CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS</b> <b><u>Climate Emergency</u></b>  The Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to achieving a target of zero carbon emissions by 2030 and helping local people and businesses to reduce their own carbon emissions.  A Cabinet Panel on the Environment has been established to engage with local people on matters relating to the climate emergency and advise the council on how to achieve these climate change objectives. A Climate Change Implementation group of councillors and council officers meets regularly to produce plans and monitor progress. Actions taken or currently underway include switching to green energy, incentives for low emission taxis, expanding tree planting and working to cut food waste.  In addition the council is a member of the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership, working with other councils across Hertfordshire to reduce the county's carbon emissions and climate impact.  The Council's dedicated webpage on Climate Change includes details of the council's climate change strategy, the work of the Cabinet Panel on the Environment and a monthly briefing on progress.  <b><u>Ecological Emergency</u></b>  The Council has declared an ecological emergency and is committed to addressing the ecological emergency and nature recovery by identifying appropriate areas for habitat restoration and biodiversity net gain whilst ensuring that development limits impact on existing habitats in its process.	

The Council has set out to do that by a) setting measurable targets and standards for biodiversity increase, in both species and quantities, seeking to increase community engagement, b) to work with our partners to establish a Local Nature Partnership for Hertfordshire and to develop Nature Recovery Networks and Nature Recovery Strategy for Hertfordshire and c) to investigate new approaches to nature recovery such as habitat banking that deliver biodiversity objectives and provide new investment opportunities.

#### Declarations of Interest

Members are reminded that any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda, should be declared as either a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or Declarable Interest and are required to notify the Chair of the nature of any interest declared at the commencement of the relevant item on the agenda. Members declaring a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest must withdraw from the meeting for the duration of the item. Members declaring a Declarable Interest, wishing to exercise a 'Councillor Speaking Right', must declare this at the same time as the interest, move to the public area before speaking to the item and then must leave the room before the debate and vote.

#### **5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

To receive petitions, comments and questions from the public.

#### **6. ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES**

To consider any items referred from other Committees. Any items referred to this meeting will be published as a supplementary document.

#### **7. ADOPTION OF THE PLANNING CONTROL COMMITTEE ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE**

27 - 42

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – GOVERNANCE/MONITORING OFFICER

To provide Members with a proposed Planning Control Committee Guidance.

#### **8. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS**

To consider any questions submitted by Members of the Council, in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.11 (b).

#### **9. NOTICE OF MOTIONS**

43 - 46

To consider any motions, due notice of which have been given in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.12.

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# Public Document Pack Agenda Item 2

## NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

### COUNCIL

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERONON ROAD, LETCHWORTH, SG6 3JF  
ON TUESDAY, 13TH JANUARY, 2026 AT 7.30 PM

### MINUTES

**Present:** *Councillors: Keith Hoskins MBE (Chair), Sadie Billing (Vice-Chair), Clare Billing, Ian Albert, Daniel Allen, Amy Allen, David Barnard, Ruth Brown, Cathy Brownjohn, Val Bryant, Rhona Cameron, Jon Clayden, Ruth Clifton, Sam Collins, Mick Debenham, Emma Fernandes, Steve Jarvis, Tim Johnson, Chris Lucas, Sarah Lucas, Ian Mantle, Nigel Mason, Bryony May, Caroline McDonnell, Ralph Muncer, Michael Muir, Lisa Nash, 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:** *Isabelle Alajooz (Director - Governance and Monitoring Officer), Robert Filby (Trainee 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 there were 2 members of the public, including registered speakers.*

#### 61 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

*Audio recording – 1 minute 07 seconds*

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors David Chalmers, Matt Barnes, Elizabeth Dennis, Joe Graziano, Sean Prendergast, Tina Bhartwas and Dominic Griffiths.

#### 62 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

*Audio recording – 1 minute 44 seconds*

There was no other business notified.

#### 63 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

*Audio recording – 1 minute 48 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 David Barnard left the Chamber at 19.32.*

#### 64 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

*Audio recording – 3 minutes 22 seconds*

There was no public participation.

#### 65 ELECTION OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

*Audio recording – 3 minutes 27 seconds*

Councillor Laura Williams proposed Councillor Val Bryant as Leader of the Council. This was seconded by Councillor Nigel Mason.

*N.B. Councillors Steven Patmore, Sam Collins entered the Chamber and David Barnard returned to the Chamber at 19.35.*

As part of the Debate, Councillor Ralph Muncer noted that his Group had voted to defend democratic processes in removing the previous leader. He noted that whilst the Conservatives would not support the nomination, they would not oppose it either, and would take the same action to remove the new Leader if the will of Council was not listened to.

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

**RESOLVED:** That Councillor Val Bryant be elected as the Leader of the Council.

In response to being elected Leader of the Council, Councillor Val Bryant noted that:

- She wanted to thank Councillor Daniel Allen for his work as previous Leader of the Council and the Council staff for navigating through the difficult weeks since the vote of no confidence.
- She would be the continuity candidate and would continue with the Council Plan and Council Delivery Plan in place.
- The work of Officers at the Council was the reason why objectives in the Council Plan were still being achieved and work delivered.
- Councillor Sean Nolan would be the new Deputy Leader of the Council.

Councillor Claire Strong congratulated Councillor Bryant on her election and noted it was right for her to take over as previous Deputy Leader. It was important that the will of Council was adhered to, as the consequences of losing the confidence of the Chamber were now known.

The meeting closed at 7.40 pm

Chair

# Public Document Pack

## 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, 26th February, 2026 at 7.30 pm

**PRESENT:** Councillors: Keith Hoskins MBE (Chair), Sadie Billing (Vice-Chair), Clare Billing, Tina Bhartwas, Ian Albert, Daniel Allen, Amy Allen, David Barnard, Matt Barnes, Ruth Brown, Cathy Brownjohn, Val Bryant, Rhona Cameron, David Chalmers, Jon Clayden, Ruth Clifton, Mick Debenham, Elizabeth Dennis, Emma Fernandes, Joe Graziano, Tim Johnson, Chris Lucas, Sarah Lucas, Ian Mantle, Nigel Mason, Bryony May, Caroline McDonnell, Ralph Muncer, Michael Muir, Lisa Nash, Sean Nolan, Louise Peace, Vijaiya Poopalasingham, Sean Prendergast, Martin Prescott, Emma Rowe, 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), Ian Couper (Director - Resources), Robert Filby (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny 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 there were 2 members of the public.

#### 83 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

*Audio recording – 1 minute 59 seconds*

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sam Collins, Dominic Griffiths, Steve Jarvis, Steven Patmore and Claire Strong.

#### 84 MINUTES - 29 JANUARY 2026

*Audio Recording – 2 minutes 24 seconds*

Councillor Val Bryant advised that a response had been received from the Executive Member for Environment, Transport and Growth at Hertfordshire County Council following the motion passed at the Full Council meeting on 29 January 2026. The response would be shared with Group Leaders in due course.

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

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 29 January 2026 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

#### 85 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

*Audio recording – 3 minutes 32 seconds*

There was no other business notified.

**86 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

*Audio recording – 3 minutes 40 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 that they had until Friday 27 February to complete the annual Outside Bodies Review Survey for each organisation that they had been appointed to.
- (7) The Chair announced that former District Councillor Jean Andrews had passed away recently.

**87 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

*Audio recording – 6 minutes 44 seconds*

There was no public participation.

**88 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES**

*Audio recording – 6 minutes 48 seconds*

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

**89 PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2026/27**

*Audio recording – 7 minutes 6 seconds*

The Director – Resources presented the report entitled 'Pay Policy Statement 2026/27' and advised that:

- The Council were required to approve a Pay Policy Statement each year before 31 March, for the following financial year.
- The pay award for the upcoming year had not yet been agreed, therefore, the policy statement reflected current pay levels. A delegation to the Director – Resources was included within the recommendations to allow for this to be updated once an award had been agreed.

- Additional information on recruitment and retention payments had been detailed at paragraph 7.1 in Appendix 1 to the report for transparency purposes.
- Pay multiples had decreased slightly as recent pay awards had seen higher increases for lower paid staff.

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

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That Council approved the 2026/27 Pay Policy Statement attached at Appendix 1.
- (2) That Council delegated authority for revisions made in year to the Pay Policy Statement, to the Director – Resources, in consultation with the Executive Member.

**REASON FOR DECISIONS:** To comply with the requirements of Section 38 of the Localism Act 2011, Statutory Guidance issued under s40 and the Local Government Transparency Code 2015.

**90 BUDGET 2026/27 (REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS)**

*Audio recording – 9 minutes 44 seconds*

The Chair invited Councillor Val Bryant, as Leader of the Council, to present the referral from Cabinet and she advised that:

- The Council had a duty to set the budget for the forthcoming year.
- The financial settlement from the Government had been better than expected and they would use this to invest in the district through a value for money approach to create a fairer, greener North Herts.
- 500 residents had responded to the Budget Consultation Survey
- While those who had responded were in favour of freezing Council Tax, this would not be financially viable as they would need to ensure that service would deliver for residents and remain sustainable in the medium-term before Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in 2028.
- Council Tax was proposed to be increased by 2.99% in line with the Medium Term Financial Strategy, which was the equivalent to 15p per week for a Band D property. However, the Council continued to see its share of the Council Tax bill decrease despite this.
- Their Council Tax Reduction Scheme would continue to remove the need for the poorest residents to pay Council Tax, and pension age residents would also continue to receive Council Tax reductions through the Government Scheme.

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled 'Budget 2026/27 (Revenue and Capital Budgets)' and advised that:

- The reports for the Revenue and Capital Budgets had been combined to cover general spending, and the Investment Strategy which covered more technical matters such as treasury investments would be discussed as a separate item.
- The Finance Team should be thanked for their work on producing the budget
- The budget would be set with the knowledge that they had a 3-year funding settlement from the Government that would cover the next two financial years of the Council and the first year of a new unitary authority. However, if the Council existed beyond 2028, they would ensure that the necessary resources would be available.
- They were grateful to residents that had participated in the Budget Consultation Survey to ascertain financial priorities following concern over the new fair funding formula.

- However, the final settlement from this had been positive and enhanced by both a reduction in required pension contributions and a projected increase in Extended Producer Responsibility payments which had removed the need to find a further £2.5M in savings.
- Funding for the Council through the Core Spending Power would increase by 4.3% next year, and by 2.3% and 2.2% in the following years.
- Additional funding for homelessness prevention had also been agreed as part of the settlement.
- There would be a prudent use of financial reserves to enable investment in the district and maintain a medium-term balanced budget.
- Members had been engaged on the budget process via budget workshops and there had been no opposition to the proposals set out within these such as increased investment in the Economic Development Team to help deliver the Economic Development Strategy.
- The top four services as ranked by residents in terms of importance in the Budget Consultation Survey were waste collections, street cleaning, greenspaces and community safety.
- The change to 3-weekly waste collections had already generated £1.2M in savings for Hertfordshire County Council.
- Reserves were healthy and general fund reserves were at a similar level, and prudent management of these would yield long lasting improvements for their services.
- £4.75M would be invested in a new learner pool at Royston Leisure Centre, which would significantly improve access to swimming facilities for all ages.
- £200K of investment would go into interactive water play at North Herts Leisure Centre to create more engaging and inclusive play spaces for families.
- £200K of capital investment would be put into digital signage for Hitchin car parks which had been welcomed by Hitchin Town BID and local businesses.
- £295K had been allocated to greenspaces across the district to increase biodiversity, repair and improve footpaths, and support wildlife at various sites.
- The Community Safety budget would be doubled from £10K to £20K to deliver additional measures to reduce crime, tackle fly tipping and address antisocial behaviour.
- An extra £30K would be provisioned to local organisations through Community Forums, and £40K would be given to key partner organisations such as North Herts Citizens Advice Bureau to continue their important work.
- £70K would be allocated to Herts Futures subject to contributions from other local authorities in the county.
- £2M would be reserved for the delivery of LGR to secure capacity through the transition phase, and to support staff by helping them to undertake the required training ahead of joining the new unitary authorities.
- The Garden Waste collection charge had already been raised to £57 per year which was still less than most other councils.
- Parking charges would be raised overall by 2%, which was less than inflation.
- Risks posed to the Council when setting the budget and how those would be monitored were detailed in Appendix D to the report. Additionally, an assessment of the risks identified by each Director had been compiled and added to the risk register.
- The Finance, Audit and Risk Committee should be thanked for their review of the budget process and assumptions.
- The minimum recommended general fund balances were set out in paragraphs 8.14-8.16 of the report.
- There was a need to increase Council Tax to continue to deliver services and address their Corporate Priorities, particularly Sustainability.
- There was an assumption that they would increase Council Tax by the maximum of 2.99%, which would be £8.01 per year for a Band D equivalent property.
- This increase would generate an extra £400K and freezing rates or increasing them by a lower percentage would be irresponsible as there was no mechanism to recover the

funding lost from not increasing rates, and services would be impacted without the extra funding.

- The Council Tax Reduction Scheme would continue to provide support to those in need, especially those who were terminally ill who were entitled to a 100% reduction.
- The Council were asked to bring forward capital expenditure on pool covers which would allow work on this to be complete before the outdoor pool season.
- Information on the implementation of a Council Tax premium on second homes was outlined at paragraph 8.30, which related to recommendation 2.9.
- They were proud of what the budget represented and would deliver for their communities.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed the recommendations in the report and this was seconded by Councillor Sean Nolan.

In response to a question from Councillor Claire Winchester, Councillor Val Bryant advised that additional spending on security at Council meetings had been proposed following recent incidents with members of the public and was a positive, precautionary measure to address the issue of safety for Members, Officers and other members of the public.

Councillor Ralph Muncer then proposed amendments to remove R1, R8, R9, R10, R15, R21, R22, R38, R40, R43, R44 and R47 from the budget and add CON1 and CON2 as detailed in the supplementary document, and highlighted that:

- They were in an age of uncertainty with the flawed approach to LGR implemented by the Government.
- Labour had increased Council Tax by 20% since being in administration, compared to other councils such as East Cambridgeshire District Council who had frozen it for the last 13 years.
- Raising Council Tax by the maximum would add to the increasing fees, charges and taxes across the board.
- No proposed amendments to the budget from the Liberal Democrats suggested an agreement between them and the administration.
- Their party represented low tax and good value for money for hardworking taxpayers and to prove this, they would cut Council Tax this year and the year after and ensure that it was frozen for the year after the Council ceased to exist.
- Should the Government delay LGR in Hertfordshire, they would be prepared to deliver additional savings and efficiencies within the Council.
- Their proposals would be paid for by reprioritising projects, reducing proposals to increase staff numbers, and diverting funding allocated to LGR back to residents as the Government should burden the costs of LGR, not the Council.
- They disagreed with the need for an Executive Member for LGR/Devolution as the responsibilities of this role should be undertaken by the Leader of the Council.
- They would be withdrawing the amendment to remove R52 as it was vital that Members and Officers should go unharmed while attending meetings.
- A Rural Parking Enforcement Officer would be introduced to ensure that rural parking was enforced and resident concerns were alleviated. An increase in Penalty Notice Charges (PCNs) would partly fund this.
- Investment into a learner pool in Royston was commended but would be consistently monitored and scrutinised so that costs would not spiral.
- Members nor members of the public had not been informed of the costs of the Churchgate project and it would be irresponsible to pay for it through borrowing.
- They wanted to take the necessary and difficult decisions for residents to retain their money, and reward working through tax cuts for residents.

This was seconded by Councillor David Barnard.

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

- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Alistair Willoughby
- Councillor Nigel Mason
- Councillor Sean Nolan
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Laura Williams
- Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Tamsin Thomas
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor Chris Lucas
- Councillor David Barnard

The following points were made as part of the debate on the amendments:

- The proposed amendments were financially irresponsible and would not balance in the medium-term.
- The proposed reduction in Council Tax was an attempt to grab short-term newspaper headlines.
- Opposition to the increase in planning fees and charges had not been justified.
- Budget workshops could have been used to discuss these amendments and there had been plenty of opportunities to table them.
- Many other councils had reserved funding for LGR such as Broxbourne.
- They wanted to provide sustainable futures for residents and funding cuts would remove stability within communities, leaving them worse off in the future.
- It was their duty as a Council to serve their community and safeguard parks and greenspaces.
- Savings on staff in the short-term would be felt by residents in the long-term.
- Amendments of this nature, submitted on the day of the meeting were not serious and were an annual performative exercise by the opposition.
- The real cost of these amendments would be £2.5M over the next three years.
- R8 would help to retain the resourcing for the Communications Team which looked internally at corporate projects that produced income and R9 would help improve services for residents not only now, but in the future. R10 would also help to support their resilience against cyberattacks and removing this, R8 and R9 were ill thought amendments.
- The Leader of the Council did not have the capacity to undertake both the responsibilities of the Executive Member for LGR/Devolution and their own.
- The Executive Member for LGR/Devolution helped to influence change in times to come and would not be needed in a business-as-usual setting. However, having an Executive Member for this was not unusual among other local authorities and would help to mitigate the lost opportunities from the transformation phase of LGR
- Time spent on LGR before May 2027 would be crucial as Members would not be able to discuss LGR after this date unless elected to a new shadow authority.
- Investment would be pulled away from staff, apprenticeship programmes and safeguarding in favour of convenient headlines that would increase pressure on already hardworking staff, weaken safeguarding capacity and incur higher costs later.
- Long-term opportunities and community investment should be chosen over short-term benefits associated with cost saving.
- Planning for LGR was key, whether it was liked or not.
- It would be reckless to cut the investment in their capacity and support structures for staff that would help to deliver the best outcomes for LGR.

- The addition of a Rural Parking Officer was an amendment designed to grab the attention of rural residents and rural parking issues could be resolved in a different way.
- The amendments would make the coordination of volunteers to help with the transfer of items from the existing museum collection facility to the new one difficult, and more expensive if they had to resort to a removal company. It would also prevent them from restarting their education outreach programme.
- R38 was needed to help the Town Hall and Museum continue to generate revenue which they had already proven they could do.
- The importance of staff in the context of LGR was not doubted.
- LGR proposals had been drawn out at the Herts Leaders Group, therefore, it was a leadership function, and they could not justify an additional £9K towards an Executive Member for this, therefore, R51 should be voted on separately.
- Council Tax reductions would be funded by the sacrifice of investment in LGR, which would be the biggest structural change the Council would ever face.
- Governance, resilience and future preparations would all be weakened by these amendments.
- The amendments had been costed, researched and discussed very carefully with Officers before submission. They would save taxpayers money which would then be spent in ailing town centres.

Following a vote, the amendments were **LOST**.

*N.B. Following the conclusion of the vote, there was a break in proceedings and the meeting reconvened at 21:04.*

*N.B. During the break, Councillor Lisa Nash left the Council Chamber and did not return.*

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

- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor Tim Johnson
- Councillor Matt Barnes
- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham
- Councillor Amy Allen
- Councillor Mick Debenham
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Donna Wright
- Councillor Alistair Willoughby

The following points were raised as part of the debate:

- Finalisation of the budget had been fraught with uncertainty from the fair funding review, but the positive outcome from this that meant they would not have to use significant amounts of their reserves in the medium-term.
- The main proposals in the budget had not been challenged at workshops as they broadly delivered on the overall strategy of the Council.
- Security arrangements for Council and Committee meetings were supported.
- The feasibility study and business case built for a new learner pool in Royston was also welcomed as it would be a wonderful community asset that would address years of the facilities in the town not keeping up with growth.
- Thanks was put on record to Members and Officers who had continued work on the feasibility of the learner pool after an amendment to include it in the budget for 2025/26 had been lost.

- It was hoped that the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee and Overview and Scrutiny Committee would guard the Council against unexpected costs of the learner pool.
- There had been a lost opportunity to build the learner pool in tandem with the decarbonisation works in terms of the costs and disruption that could have been saved.
- There would be a fair financial return on the Royston learner pool by 2040.
- More funding towards North Herts Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), North Herts Centre for Voluntary Services (CVS) and North Herts Minority Ethnic Forum (MEF) were welcome additions to the budget.
- £9K for the Executive Member for LGR/Devolution should be funded by existing budgets.
- This was a well-balanced, structured budget that put communities and residents first and included support towards local organisations and homelessness prevention.
- Funding for greenspaces would benefit the next generation of residents.
- Residents of Great Ashby were represented by those in the administration, correcting years of under representation and delivering for them.
- They were proud that the Council could deliver a new major asset for the district.
- It felt good to be able to address concerns expressed by Royston residents on pool facilities in the town.
- Continued support for North Herts CAB, CVS and MEF showed that they valued organisations within the district that worked behind the scenes to bring people together.
- Increased funding for community grants would empower local groups, volunteers and grassroots projects that would make a real difference in neighbourhoods.
- This budget demonstrated that the Council had remained in good health and the Executive Member and Director for Resources should be commended.
- Financial stability would not be compromised by the resilience that would be built by this budget ahead of LGR.
- Their commitment to new car parking signage in Hitchin would ease congestion across the town and support better parking.
- A huge difference was made to the community by the Wellbeing Team and the provision for a permanent Community Wellbeing Officer would help to keep this.

In response to points raised in the debate, Councillor Ian Albert advised that:

- There had been cross-party unanimity on budget issues, with Royston Learner Pool being an example of this.
- Budget provision for a Rural Enforcement Officer could have been accepted if it had been proposed further in advance, and Members were urged to discuss proposals like these with them in the future.
- Delivery of the learner pool would be scrutinised to ensure that it stayed on track.

Having been proposed and seconded and, the outcome of the recorded vote was:

VOTE TOTALS:

YES	:	40
ABSTAIN	:	5
NO	:	0
TOTAL	:	45

THE INDIVIDUAL RESULTS WERE AS FOLLOWS:

Cllr Ian Albert	YES
Cllr Amy Allen	YES
Cllr Daniel Allen	YES
Cllr David Barnard	ABSTAIN
Cllr Matt Barnes	YES
Cllr Tina Bhartwas	YES

Cllr Clare Billing	YES
Cllr Sadie Billing	YES
Cllr Ruth Brown	YES
Cllr Cathy Brownjohn	YES
Cllr Val Bryant	YES
Cllr Rhona Cameron	YES
Cllr David Chalmers	YES
Cllr Jon Clayden	YES
Cllr Ruth Clifton	YES
Cllr Mick Debenham	YES
Cllr Elizabeth Dennis	YES
Cllr Emma Fernandes	YES
Cllr Joe Graziano	ABSTAIN
Cllr Keith Hoskins	YES
Cllr Tim Johnson	YES
Cllr Chris Lucas	YES
Cllr Sarah Lucas	YES
Cllr Ian Mantle	YES
Cllr Nigel Mason	YES
Cllr Bryony May	YES
Cllr Caroline McDonnell	YES
Cllr Ralph Muncer	ABSTAIN
Cllr Michael Muir	ABSTAIN
Cllr Sean Nolan	YES
Cllr Louise Peace	YES
Cllr Vijaiya Poopalasingham	YES
Cllr Sean Prendergast	YES
Cllr Martin Prescott	ABSTAIN
Cllr Emma Rowe	YES
Cllr Tamsin Thomas	YES
Cllr Tom Tyson	YES
Cllr Paul Ward	YES
Cllr Laura Williams	YES
Cllr Alistair Willoughby	YES
Cllr Stewart Willoughby	YES
Cllr Claire Winchester	YES
Cllr Dave Winstanley	YES
Cllr Donna Wright	YES
Cllr Daniel Wright-Mason	YES

**RESOLVED:** That Council:

- (1) Noted the position on the Collection Fund and how it would be funded.
- (2) Noted the position relating to the General Fund balance and that due to the risks identified a minimum balance of £3.5 million was recommended.
- (3) Noted the Chief Finance Officer's section 25 report (Appendix D) which provided a commentary on the risks and reliability of estimates contained in the budget.
- (4) Approved the revenue savings and investments as detailed in Appendix B.
- (5) Approved the capital programme as detailed in Appendix C.
- (6) Approved a net expenditure budget of £27.524m as detailed in Appendix E.
- (7) Approved a Council Tax increase of 2.99%, which was in line with the provisions in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

- (8) Approved bringing forward the capital budget for pool covers at the outdoor pools to 2025/26.
- (9) Noted that a Council Tax premium on Second Homes would be implemented from 1 April 2026, which adopted the decision taken by Council on 29 February 2024.

**REASONS FOR DECISIONS:**

- (1) To ensure that all relevant factors are considered in arriving at a budget (revenue and capital) and Council Tax level for 2026/27.
- (2) To ensure that the budget is aligned to Council priorities for 2024-28 as set out in the Council Plan.

**91 INVESTMENT STRATEGY 2026/27**

*Audio recording – 1 hour 58 minutes 0 seconds*

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

*N.B. Councillor Ruth Clifton left the Chamber at 21:31 and did not return.*

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Resources, presented the referral from Cabinet and the report entitled 'Investment Strategy 2026/27' and advised that:

- The Investment Strategy detailed the assets the Council had and how they would maintain them, in addition to their plans for new assets.
- It would also determine funding for capital spend and an approach to borrowing a minimum revenue provision.
- The approach to investing surplus cash would be determined by a focus on investments that would provide security, liquidity and yield.
- Following the motion on Local Government Pension Scheme and Responsible Investment passed by Council on 4 December 2025, they had met with treasury advisors to address the requirements of the motion without putting the Council at risk.
- Changes made to the strategy had been outlined at paragraph 8.8 in the report although it was noted that it would be impractical to change their bank account right now.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Sean Nolan seconded the recommendations in the report.

As part of the debate, Councillor Dave Winstanley put on record his thanks to Members and Officers for all the work that had gone into producing the Investment Strategy and for the inclusion of Environmental, Social and Governance investments throughout it.

As part of the debate, Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason also put on record his thanks to Members and Officers for the speed with which they had implemented these changes and that it was a good first step towards change.

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

**RESOLVED:** That Council:

- (1) Approved the adoption of the Investment Strategy (as attached at Appendix A).
- (2) Approved the adoption of the four clauses in relation to the Code of Practice on Treasury Management (as detailed in paragraphs 8.10 to 8.16).

**REASON FOR DECISIONS:** To ensure the Council's compliance with CIPFA's code of practice on Treasury Management, the Local Government Act 2003, statutory guidance from Government, and the CIPFA Prudential Code. As well as determining and managing the Council's risk appetite in respect of investments.

*N.B. Following the conclusion of the item, Councillor Paul Ward returned to the Chamber at 21:35.*

**92 COUNCIL TAX RESOLUTION 2026/27**

*Audio recording – 2 hours 3 minutes 30 seconds*

The Director – Resources presented the report entitled 'Council Tax Resolution 2026/27' and advised that:

- The Council Tax rate set by the Council was combined with those of the Police and Crime Commissioner and Hertfordshire County Council to formally set Council Tax for the district in 2026/27.
- The format for Council Tax was set out in the Local Authorities Regulations 2012, which were outlined in the report.
- Appendix A to the report explained the reason for each element in the recommendations.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Sean Nolan seconded and, the outcome of the recorded vote was:

**VOTE TOTALS:**

YES	:	39
ABSTAIN	:	5
NO	:	0
TOTAL	:	44

**THE INDIVIDUAL RESULTS WERE AS FOLLOWS:**

Cllr Ian Albert	YES
Cllr Amy Allen	YES
Cllr Daniel Allen	YES
Cllr David Barnard	ABSTAIN
Cllr Matt Barnes	YES
Cllr Tina Bhartwas	YES
Cllr Clare Billing	YES
Cllr Sadie Billing	YES
Cllr Ruth Brown	YES
Cllr Cathy Brownjohn	YES
Cllr Val Bryant	YES
Cllr Rhona Cameron	YES
Cllr David Chalmers	YES
Cllr Jon Clayden	YES
Cllr Mick Debenham	YES
Cllr Elizabeth Dennis	YES
Cllr Emma Fernandes	YES
Cllr Joe Graziano	ABSTAIN
Cllr Keith Hoskins	YES
Cllr Tim Johnson	YES
Cllr Chris Lucas	YES
Cllr Sarah Lucas	YES

Cllr Ian Mantle	YES
Cllr Nigel Mason	YES
Cllr Bryony May	YES
Cllr Caroline McDonnell	YES
Cllr Ralph Muncer	ABSTAIN
Cllr Michael Muir	ABSTAIN
Cllr Sean Nolan	YES
Cllr Louise Peace	YES
Cllr Vijaiya Poopalasingham	YES
Cllr Sean Prendergast	YES
Cllr Martin Prescott	ABSTAIN
Cllr Emma Rowe	YES
Cllr Tamsin Thomas	YES
Cllr Tom Tyson	YES
Cllr Paul Ward	YES
Cllr Laura Williams	YES
Cllr Alistair Willoughby	YES
Cllr Stewart Willoughby	YES
Cllr Claire Winchester	YES
Cllr Dave Winstanley	YES
Cllr Donna Wright	YES
Cllr Daniel Wright-Mason	YES

**RESOLVED:**

(1) That it was noted that at its meeting on 29 January 2026 the Council Tax Setting Committee confirmed the amount 51,529.0 as its Council Tax base for the year 2026/2027 in accordance with regulation 3 of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 2012 (the Regulations).

a) 51,529.0 being the amount calculated by the Council, in accordance with Regulation 3 of the Regulations, as its Council Tax base for the year.

b)	Parish/Town	Council Tax Base	Parish/Town	Council Tax Base
	Ashwell	909.00	Knebworth	2,074.50
	Barkway	439.90	Lilley	183.80
	Barley	341.80	Offley	621.20
	Bygrave	133.90	Pirton	709.60
	Caldecote and Newnham	60.60	Preston	262.10
	Clothall	88.70	Radwell	56.70
	Codicote	1,835.00	Reed	164.30
	Graveley	180.50	Royston	7,035.80
	Great Ashby	2,018.00	Rushden and Wallington	209.60
	Hinxworth	163.00	St Ippolyts	961.90
	Holwell	157.30	St Pauls Walden	577.80
	Ickleford	953.80	Sandon	258.60
	Kelshall	80.60	Therfield	278.30
	Kimpton	1,089.30	Weston	447.70
	Kings Walden	427.50	Wymondley	428.50

Being the amounts calculated by the Council, in accordance with Regulation 6 of the Regulations, as the amounts of its Council Tax base for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which one or more special items relate.

- c) That it was noted that its meeting on the 26 February 2026 the Council has calculated the Council Tax requirement for the Council's own purposes for 2026/27 (excluding Parish precepts) as £14,211,183. As detailed in 2.2 (e) below the sum of special items is £1,779,755 and hence the total Council Tax requirement (including Parish precepts) is £15,990,938.
- (2) That the following amounts be now calculated by the Council for 2026/2027 in accordance with Sections 31A, 31B and 34 to 36 of the Local Government and Finance Act 1992 (the Act):-

- a) £85,997,958 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2)(a) to (f) of the Act.
- b) £70,007,020 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3) (a) to (d) of the Act.
- c) £15,990,938 being the amount by which the aggregate at (a) above exceeds the aggregate at (b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act, as its Council Tax requirement for the year.
- d) £310.33 being the amount at (c) above divided by the amount at 2.1(a) above calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 31B(1) as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year.
- e) £1,779,755 being the aggregate amount of all special items referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act.
- f) £275.79 being the amount at (d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at (e) above by the amount at 2.1(a) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no special item relates.

g)

Parish/Town	Basic £	Parish Precept £	Total £
Ashwell	275.79	137.36	413.15
Barkway	275.79	104.35	380.14
Barley	275.79	107.93	383.72
Bygrave	275.79	80.11	355.90
Caldecote and Newnham	275.79	39.81	315.60
Clothall	275.79	20.32	296.11
Codicote	275.79	62.92	338.71
Graveley	275.79	55.96	331.75
Great Ashby	275.79	24.63	300.42
Hinxworth	275.79	70.64	346.43
Holwell	275.79	97.03	372.82
Ickleford	275.79	70.77	346.56
Kelshall	275.79	49.63	325.42
Kimpton	275.79	87.58	363.37
Kings Walden	275.79	96.99	372.78

Parish/Town	Basic £	Parish Precept £	Total £
Knebworth	275.79	93.27	369.06
Lilley	275.79	118.19	393.98
Offley	275.79	72.40	348.19
Pirton	275.79	95.24	371.03
Preston	275.79	68.74	344.53
Radwell	275.79	27.16	302.95
Reed	275.79	52.41	328.20
Royston	275.79	84.92	360.71
Rushden and Wallington	275.79	21.15	296.94
St Ippolyts	275.79	46.61	322.40
St Pauls Walden	275.79	91.81	367.60
Sandon	275.79	32.87	308.66
Therfield	275.79	47.43	323.22
Weston	275.79	55.84	331.63
Wymondley	275.79	103.50	379.29

being the amounts given by adding to the amount at 2.2(f) above the amounts of the special item or items relating to dwellings in those parts of the Council's area mentioned above divided in each case by the amount at 2.1(b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(3) of the Act, as the basic amounts of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which one or more special items relate.

h)

Parish/Town	Valuation Bands							
	A £	B £	C £	D £	E £	F £	G £	H £
Ashwell	275.43	321.34	367.25	413.15	504.96	596.78	688.58	826.30
Baldock	183.86	214.50	245.15	275.79	337.08	398.36	459.65	551.58
Barkway	253.43	295.66	337.91	380.14	464.62	549.10	633.57	760.28
Barley	255.81	298.45	341.09	383.72	468.99	554.27	639.53	767.44
Bygrave	237.27	276.81	316.36	355.90	434.99	514.08	593.17	711.80
Caldecote and Newnham	210.40	245.46	280.54	315.60	385.74	455.87	526.00	631.20
Clothall	197.41	230.30	263.21	296.11	361.92	427.72	493.52	592.22
Codicote	225.81	263.44	301.08	338.71	413.98	489.25	564.52	677.42
Graveley	221.17	258.02	294.89	331.75	405.48	479.20	552.92	663.50
Great Ashby	200.28	233.66	267.04	300.42	367.18	433.95	500.70	600.84
Hexton	183.86	214.50	245.15	275.79	337.08	398.36	459.65	551.58
Hinxworth	230.95	269.44	307.94	346.43	423.42	500.41	577.38	692.86
Hitchin	183.86	214.50	245.15	275.79	337.08	398.36	459.65	551.58
Holwell	248.55	289.97	331.40	372.82	455.67	538.52	621.37	745.64
Ickleford	231.04	269.54	308.06	346.56	423.58	500.59	577.60	693.12
Kelshall	216.95	253.10	289.27	325.42	397.74	470.06	542.37	650.84
Kimpton	242.25	282.62	323.00	363.37	444.12	524.87	605.62	726.74
Kings Walden	248.52	289.94	331.36	372.78	455.62	538.47	621.30	745.56
Knebworth	246.04	287.04	328.06	369.06	451.08	533.09	615.10	738.12
Langley	183.86	214.50	245.15	275.79	337.08	398.36	459.65	551.58
Letchworth	183.86	214.50	245.15	275.79	337.08	398.36	459.65	551.58
Lilley	262.65	306.43	350.21	393.98	481.53	569.09	656.63	787.96
Nuthampstead	183.86	214.50	245.15	275.79	337.08	398.36	459.65	551.58
Offley	232.13	270.81	309.51	348.19	425.57	502.95	580.32	696.38
Pirton	247.35	288.58	329.81	371.03	453.48	535.94	618.38	742.06
Preston	229.69	267.96	306.25	344.53	421.10	497.66	574.22	689.06
Radwell	201.97	235.62	269.29	302.95	370.28	437.60	504.92	605.90
Reed	218.80	255.26	291.74	328.20	401.14	474.07	547.00	656.40
Royston	240.47	280.55	320.63	360.71	440.87	521.03	601.18	721.42
Rushden and Wallington	197.96	230.95	263.95	296.94	362.93	428.92	494.90	593.88
St Ippolyts	214.93	250.75	286.58	322.40	394.05	465.70	537.33	644.80
St Pauls Walden	245.07	285.91	326.76	367.60	449.29	530.98	612.67	735.20
Sandon	205.77	240.07	274.37	308.66	377.25	445.85	514.43	617.32
Therfield	215.48	251.39	287.31	323.22	395.05	466.88	538.70	646.44

Parish/Town	Valuation Bands							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Weston	221.09	257.93	294.79	331.63	405.33	479.03	552.72	663.26
Wymondley	252.86	295.00	337.15	379.29	463.58	547.87	632.15	758.58

being the amounts given by multiplying the amounts at 2.2(f) and 2.2(g) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in valuation band D, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 36(l) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands.

- (3) That it was noted that for 2026/2027 Hertfordshire County Council and the Hertfordshire Police & Crime Commissioner has stated the following amounts in precepts issued to the Council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Act, for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:-

Precepting Authority	Valuation Bands							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
<b>Hertfordshire County Council</b>	1,238.79	1,445.26	1,651.73	1,858.19	2,271.12	2,684.05	3,096.98	3,716.38
<b>Hertfordshire Police &amp; Crime Commissioner</b>	186.67	217.78	248.89	280.00	342.22	404.44	466.67	560.00

- (4) That, having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at 2.2(h) and 2.3 above, the Council, in accordance with Section 30(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets out the following provisional amounts as the amounts of Council Tax for 2026/2027 for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:-

List of parishes and tax at different band (County, Care, Police, District and Parish)

Parish/Town	Valuation Bands							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Ashwell	1,700.89	1,984.38	2,267.86	2,551.34	3,118.30	3,685.27	4,252.23	5,102.68
Baldock	1,609.32	1,877.54	2,145.77	2,413.98	2,950.42	3,486.85	4,023.30	4,827.96
Barkway	1,678.89	1,958.70	2,238.52	2,518.33	3,077.96	3,637.59	4,197.22	5,036.66
Barley	1,681.27	1,961.49	2,241.70	2,521.91	3,082.33	3,642.76	4,203.18	5,043.82
Bygrave	1,662.73	1,939.85	2,216.97	2,494.09	3,048.33	3,602.57	4,156.82	4,988.18
Caldecote and Newnham	1,635.86	1,908.50	2,181.15	2,453.79	2,999.08	3,544.36	4,089.65	4,907.58
Clothall	1,622.87	1,893.34	2,163.82	2,434.30	2,975.26	3,516.21	4,057.17	4,868.60
Codicote	1,651.27	1,926.48	2,201.69	2,476.90	3,027.32	3,577.74	4,128.17	4,953.80
Graveley	1,646.63	1,921.06	2,195.50	2,469.94	3,018.82	3,567.69	4,116.57	4,939.88
Great Ashby	1,625.74	1,896.70	2,167.65	2,438.61	2,980.52	3,522.44	4,064.35	4,877.22
Hexton	1,609.32	1,877.54	2,145.77	2,413.98	2,950.42	3,486.85	4,023.30	4,827.96
Hinxworth	1,656.41	1,932.48	2,208.55	2,484.62	3,036.76	3,588.90	4,141.03	4,969.24
Hitchin	1,609.32	1,877.54	2,145.77	2,413.98	2,950.42	3,486.85	4,023.30	4,827.96
Holwell	1,674.01	1,953.01	2,232.01	2,511.01	3,069.01	3,627.01	4,185.02	5,022.02
Ickleford	1,656.50	1,932.58	2,208.67	2,484.75	3,036.92	3,589.08	4,141.25	4,969.50
Kelshall	1,642.41	1,916.14	2,189.88	2,463.61	3,011.08	3,558.55	4,106.02	4,927.22
Kimpton	1,667.71	1,945.66	2,223.61	2,501.56	3,057.46	3,613.36	4,169.27	5,003.12
Kings Walden	1,673.98	1,952.98	2,231.97	2,510.97	3,068.96	3,626.96	4,184.95	5,021.94
Knebworth	1,671.50	1,950.08	2,228.67	2,507.25	3,064.42	3,621.58	4,178.75	5,014.50
Langley	1,609.32	1,877.54	2,145.77	2,413.98	2,950.42	3,486.85	4,023.30	4,827.96
Letchworth	1,609.32	1,877.54	2,145.77	2,413.98	2,950.42	3,486.85	4,023.30	4,827.96
Lilley	1,688.11	1,969.47	2,250.82	2,532.17	3,094.87	3,657.58	4,220.28	5,064.34
Nuthampstead	1,609.32	1,877.54	2,145.77	2,413.98	2,950.42	3,486.85	4,023.30	4,827.96
Offley	1,657.59	1,933.85	2,210.12	2,486.38	3,038.91	3,591.44	4,143.97	4,972.76
Pirton	1,672.81	1,951.62	2,230.42	2,509.22	3,066.82	3,624.43	4,182.03	5,018.44
Preston	1,655.15	1,931.00	2,206.86	2,482.72	3,034.44	3,586.15	4,137.87	4,965.44

Radwell	1,627.43	1,898.66	2,169.90	2,441.14	2,983.62	3,526.09	4,068.57	4,882.28
Reed	1,644.26	1,918.30	2,192.35	2,466.39	3,014.48	3,562.56	4,110.65	4,932.78
Royston	1,665.93	1,943.59	2,221.24	2,498.90	3,054.21	3,609.52	4,164.83	4,997.80
Rushden and Wallington	1,623.42	1,893.99	2,164.56	2,435.13	2,976.27	3,517.41	4,058.55	4,870.26
St Ippolyts	1,640.39	1,913.79	2,187.19	2,460.59	3,007.39	3,554.19	4,100.98	4,921.18
St Pauls Walden	1,670.53	1,948.95	2,227.37	2,505.79	3,062.63	3,619.47	4,176.32	5,011.58
Sandon	1,631.23	1,903.11	2,174.98	2,446.85	2,990.59	3,534.34	4,078.08	4,893.70
Therfield	1,640.94	1,914.43	2,187.92	2,461.41	3,008.39	3,555.37	4,102.35	4,922.82
Weston	1,646.55	1,920.97	2,195.40	2,469.82	3,018.67	3,567.52	4,116.37	4,939.64
Wymondley	1,678.32	1,958.04	2,237.76	2,517.48	3,076.92	3,636.36	4,195.80	5,034.96

**REASON FOR DECISIONS:** The Council is required to set the Council Tax and to set the overall level of Council Tax for the following financial year, taking into account the precepts of all major and local precepting authorities.

*N.B. Following the conclusion of the item, Councillors Martin Prescott and Rhona Cameron left the Chamber at 21:39 and did not return.*

### 93 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

*Audio recording – 2 hours 5 minutes 24 seconds*

In accordance with Standing Order 4.8.11, no questions had been submitted by the required deadline set out in the Constitution.

### 94 NOTICE OF MOTIONS

*Audio recording – 2 hours 5 minutes 33 seconds*

There was one motion submitted in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.12.

#### (A) Support for Trans Rights

Councillor Sadie Billing proposed the motion as follows:

‘Council notes that:

The Supreme Court, in the case of *Women Scotland v the Scottish Ministers*, ruled that the terms “man”, “woman” and “sex” in the Equality Act 2010 refer to “biological sex”. This judgement does not remove legal protection from trans people, as gender reassignment remains a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act 1998. The law requiring respect for trans rights has not changed.

However, the judgement, and the subsequent interim (now withdrawn) guidance from the Equality and Human Rights Commission, has caused significant anxiety, uncertainty, and fear for the trans community. A recent Gallup survey found that two thirds of LGBTQ+ respondents had experienced anti LGBTQ+ violence or abuse, with abuse particularly severe for trans people. The LGBTQ+ community is more likely to experience disproportionately poor health outcomes, workplace conflict, homelessness, and barriers to accessing public services.

Council believes that:

1. Everyone should be safe and free to be themselves, without fear of hostility, violence, or discrimination.
2. Nobody’s life chances should be limited or determined because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.
3. Everyone deserves clarity and reassurance on how their rights will be protected.

4. The erosion of trans rights threatens everyone's rights.

Therefore, Council resolves to:

1. Affirm their support for trans, non-binary, and gender diverse residents and our commitment to defending their rights and dignity.
2. Request the Leader of the Council to write to the Minister for Women and Equalities to:
  - (a) Express that the position of this Council is to support trans rights.
  - (b) Request guidance on how existing legislation will continue to protect the rights of trans people.
  - (c) Request clarity on whether the Government will bring forward new legislation in this area.
3. Commit to supporting Officers to take meaningful steps to promote safety and inclusion so that North Herts continues to be a welcoming and inclusive place for the LGBTQ+ community.
4. Build upon Council policies and practice to ensure that they explicitly affirm support for trans, non binary, and gender diverse people and that language used is inclusive.
5. Ensure that LGBTQ+ inclusion and trans awareness form part of ongoing staff and Councillor training, using existing or freely available resources.
6. Publicly mark and promote significant dates for the LGBTQ+ community (such as Pride, Trans Day of Visibility, etc.) through Council communications channels, as appropriate.
7. Continue to engage with local LGBTQ+ residents, staff, and organisations to inform Council services, community safety approaches, and staff policies (for example the recent funding with Impactful Lives).
8. Promote ways to report hate crimes and discrimination, ensuring that local and national support services are clearly signposted on Council platforms.
9. Continue to include commitments to equality, inclusion, and non-discrimination in Council supplier and partner expectations, encouraging inclusive practice in all Council linked work.
10. Actively encourage applications from LGBTQ+ people for Council jobs by:
  - (a) Requesting officers to consider whether any changes to recruitment practices are necessary or appropriate to support inclusion, and to bring forward any recommendations through the appropriate governance route.
  - (b) Reviewing recruitment processes to ensure they are inclusive and free from unnecessary barriers.
  - (c) Promoting the Council as an inclusive employer via LGBTQ+ networks, events, and community groups.
  - (d) Investigating whether the Council can offer the option to display pronouns during the application and onboarding process at no additional cost.

Any actions arising from this motion will be subject to existing legislation, available resources and appropriate governance and decision-making processes.'

Councillor David Chalmers seconded the motion.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason
- Councillor Claire Winchester
- Councillor David Chalmers
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Tom Tyson
- Councillor Alistair Willoughby
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Tamsin Thomas
- Councillor Joe Graziano

The following points were made as part of the debate:

- Stonewall had found that 41% of trans people had experienced a hate crime in the last year and more than half hid who they were at work for fear of discrimination.
- Impactful Lives had found that 73% of the LGBTQ+ community in Hertfordshire thought society attitudes towards trans people had become increasingly negative in recent years and 87% felt that attitudes had become more negative overall.
- This motion would not change the law or address concerns immediately, but it would recognise the concerns of residents and support their rights, dignity and safety.
- They were happy to support the safety of young trans people in the district.
- If the Council did not support this motion, they would be ignoring the abuse and bullying that young trans people faced, therefore, it should be passed to ensure that regressive or exclusionary policies that would put them at risk of harm would not return.
- It was an honour to second this important motion that dealt with basic human rights for those in the community.
- The same fear and shame that had riddled homosexuals in the past had also destroyed the lives of many trans people recently.
- Trans people had been demonised and felt to feel like a threat to society because of the actions of a few.
- Impactful Lives had also found that 86% of the LGBTQ+ community they surveyed in Hertfordshire had experienced an increase in hostility or hate speech.
- Hertfordshire Constabulary would no longer participate in pride events across the county which added to the situation.
- Passing this motion would reaffirm the support that statutory bodies like the Council had for trans and non-binary residents.
- Respect, dignity and equality would be given to trans people from this motion.
- Freedom of expression did not mean having the right to demonise others and both transphobic and homophobic comments were not tolerated and should not be left unchecked.
- This motion sent a simple, powerful message that the Council stood for inclusion.
- They were proud of how far things had come since the Section 28 legislation that had made it illegal for local authorities to promote homosexuality in a positive way.
- With darks cloud on the horizon, Members were urged to vote in favour of this motion.
- Supporting this motion would allow more people to be themselves and make the world a better, more interesting place.
- The Supreme Court of Justice had got it right as their ruling had not weakened the legal protections for the trans community under the Equalities Act.

- It would be hypocritical to support this motion when they had a Women and Girls Safety Charter in place across North Herts and supporting it would allow biological males to be present in changing rooms and toilets for women and girls.
- It would be remis to neglect the struggles that trans people had faced and by acknowledging their support for them, they were not removing their support for women and girls.
- Academic studies had proven that when society had failed to acknowledge LGBTQ+ rights, rights for women and girls were not acknowledged either.
- Treating trans people with prejudice set back the progress on rights for women.
- More positive, diverse representation was hoped to be seen across the district.
- Fear of trans women in changing rooms and toilets was a manufactured fear and should not influence the direction of this motion.
- In an ideal world, they would not be discussing this motion or have to press for basic human rights.

Councillor Sadie Billing replied to the debate and advised that:

- Supporting trans rights would not weaken rights for women and girls as the law protected both.
- This motion affirmed the provision of dignity, safety and respect for everyone.

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

**RESOLVED:** That Council:

- (1) Affirm their support for trans, non-binary, and gender diverse residents and their commitment to defending their rights and dignity.
- (2) Request the Leader of the Council to write to the Minister for Women and Equalities to:
  - (a) Express the position of this Council is to support trans rights.
  - (b) Request guidance on how existing legislation will continue to protect the rights of trans people.
  - (c) Request clarity on whether the Government will bring forward new legislation in this area.
- (3) Commit to supporting Officers to take meaningful steps to promote safety and inclusion so that North Herts continues to be a welcoming and inclusive place for the LGBTQ+ community.
- (4) Build upon Council policies and practice to ensure that they explicitly affirm support for trans, non binary, and gender diverse people and that language used is inclusive.
- (5) Ensure that LGBTQ+ inclusion and trans awareness form part of ongoing staff and Councillor training, using existing or freely available resources.
- (6) Publicly mark and promote significant dates for the LGBTQ+ community (such as Pride, Trans Day of Visibility, etc.) through Council communications channels, as appropriate.
- (7) Continue to engage with local LGBTQ+ residents, staff, and organisations to inform Council services, community safety approaches, and staff policies (for example the recent funding with Impactful Lives).
- (8) Promote ways to report hate crimes and discrimination, ensuring that local and national support services are clearly signposted on Council platforms.

- (9) Continue to include commitments to equality, inclusion, and non-discrimination in Council supplier and partner expectations, encouraging inclusive practice in all Council linked work.
- (10) Actively encourage applications from LGBTQ+ people for Council jobs by:
  - (a) Requesting officers to consider whether any changes to recruitment practices are necessary or appropriate to support inclusion, and to bring forward any recommendations through the appropriate governance route.
  - (b) Reviewing recruitment processes to ensure they are inclusive and free from unnecessary barriers.
  - (c) Promoting the Council as an inclusive employer via LGBTQ+ networks, events, and community groups.
  - (d) Investigating whether the Council can offer the option to display pronouns during the application and onboarding process at no additional cost.

The meeting closed at 9.57 pm

Chair

**COUNCIL**

**DATE 23 April 2026**

**\*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

**TITLE OF REPORT: ADOPTION OF THE PLANNING CONTROL COMMITTEE  
ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE**

**REPORT OF: SERVICE DIRECTOR: GOVERNANCE/ MONITORING OFFICER**

**COUNCIL PRIORITY: RESPONSIBLE GROWTH**

**1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

To provide Members with a proposed Planning Control Committee Guidance.

The introduction of this additional guidance aims to supplement the Members Planning Code of Good Practice which is already found as an Appendix to Part 8 of the Constitution: [Microsoft Word - CONSTITUTION - Sections 1-18 final 22.5.25.docx](#).

This guidance applies to all Members (not just planning committee members) at all times when involved in the planning process and compliments the constitutional ethical framework already in operation.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that:

- 2.1. Full Council approve and adopt the Planning Control Committee Guidance into the Constitution.

**3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 The role of the Planning Control Committee has increased in interest over recent years with substantial resident interaction.
- 3.2 The Guidance should be read in conjunction with the Members' Code of Conduct and the Protocol on Councillor- Officer Relations. The purpose of this guidance is to provide additional advice on the standards to be applied specifically in relation to planning matters. The key purpose of Planning is to proactively manage development in the wider public interest.

#### **4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

None

#### **5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS**

All Group Leaders have been consulted

#### **6. FORWARD PLAN**

- 6.1** This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

#### **7. BACKGROUND**

- 7.1** The Council's constitutional documents comprise various codes and protocols which govern the conduct of Officers and Members in carrying out their duties.

- 7.2** It is considered beneficial to have in place additional arrangements on the operation of the planning control committee to ensure that Members and Officers fully understand the parameters of the Planning Control Committee (PCC or 'the Committee'). The Committee exercises those functions of the local planning authority not delegated to the Director: Place.

- 7.3** The Director: Place may refer a matter to the Planning Control Committee for determination or consideration if the application is controversial or of significant public interest or is likely to have a significant impact on the environment.

These arrangements, in the way of this additional guidance should be adopted into the Constitution to ensure transparency on the role of the committee and also evidence the commitment of the Council to supporting the delivery of this statutory process.

#### **8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS**

- 8.1** Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972 enables local authorities to arrange for the discharge of their functions by committees, sub-committees, or officers.

The operation of the PCC is a significant investment of time and resource and requires the close coordination of planning, democratic services and legal teams. It plays an essential role in providing democratic and transparent decisions. The creation of this additional guidance intends to enhance the operation of the committee and governance framework to ensure that the Councils make and are seen to make planning decisions on proper planning grounds and that the Councils make (and are seen to make) decisions properly, openly, impartially, and for justifiable reasons.

## **General**

- 8.2** The guidance includes a general explanation on the role of the committee and members in attending the committee as part of the decision making and ethical framework within the Constitution. It sets out the parameters, use and manner of:
- Pre Application Discussions
  - Member Briefings
  - Site Visits

### **Pre Application Discussions:**

- 8.3** This section of the guidance sets out the purpose and benefits of pre application discussions.

It is well recognised that these can be helpful, productive and of considerable benefit to both parties in relation to development proposals that are complex, controversial or of major local significance eg large housing estates, waste disposal sites, wind farms, industrial estates/business parks and supermarkets.

- 8.4** Unfortunately, it would be easy for such discussions to become, or be seen by objectors to become part of the lobbying process on the part of the applicant. It is therefore essential that where any discussions are held in relation to such major development proposals it is done within carefully established guidelines as set out in the protocol. This guidance sets out the manner in which these will be held.

### **Members Briefings**

- 8.5** The Council has also introduced Member Briefings into the planning decision making process.

It is essential to highlight that there is no mandatory requirement for Members to attend any Briefing although their presence is strongly encouraged and welcomed. Non attendance therefore does not prevent a Member from their subsequent participation in deciding an application when it comes before the Committee. This will strengthen the robustness of the decision-making process.

- 8.6** As referenced within the guidance, Committee Members should exercise caution when discussing matters at the briefing which could be perceived as showing they had taken a fixed position on the proposals (or any aspect of them) or could be taken as an indication of predetermination or bias.
- 8.7** However subject to that constraint, Committee Members (and other members) should feel free to ask questions to understand and explore the nature of proposals being considered at the briefing. Questions primarily should be factual, but it would be perfectly in order, for example, for a member to ask whether a particular option or approach had been explored or why a particular approach had not been explored or whether it could be explored in the future.

## **Site Visit Protocol**

- 8.8** The purpose of a site visit is to enable committee members to see the physical attributes of the site and its setting which are part of the material considerations in cases where these are not readily capable of being appreciated from documentary material

A site visit request will need to be made in writing unless it has been deemed necessary by the Development and Conservation Manager in consultation with the Chair. It can be made in one of two ways:

- i) Pre Committee:** - to support expedient decision-making.
- ii) At a Planning Control Committee** - Any Planning Control Committee Member may propose that a decision on an application be deferred to allow a site visit to take place. If seconded and voted upon by a majority of Members, a site visit will take place.

- 8.9** Members proposing a site visit must state planning reasons for visiting the site and identify how / why the pre-meeting site visit protocols set out above were not utilised and are not sufficient to allow a decision to proceed.

- 8.10** Attendance at a site visit is not mandatory, similarly to attendance at briefings. Following a site visit, officers will provide a brief update to members of any significant additional information or issues raised at the site visit.

Members of the Committee who were not able to attend the site visit should consider whether they have sufficient information before them to enable them to take part in determining the application

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1.** Section 9P of the Local Government Act 2000 as amended sets out the duty of the Council to prepare and keep up to date its constitution as follows:

(1) A local authority must prepare and keep up to date a document (referred to in this section as its constitution) which contains— (a) a copy of the authority's standing orders for the time being, (b) a copy of the authority's code of conduct (if any) for the time being under section 28 of the Localism Act 2011, (c) such information as the Secretary of State may direct, and (d) such other information (if any) as the authority considers appropriate.

- 9.2.** The Council Constitution is made available on our public website and it is for the Monitoring Officer to monitor and review the operation of the constitution on an ongoing basis and where necessary bring forward amendments to Council.

- 9.3.** There is a risk of legal challenge to the decisions made by the Planning Control Committee if robust and consistent procedures are not in place in line with current national guidance. There is also a greater risk of a Local Government Ombudsman complaint being upheld if the Authority does not provide clear, consistent and up to date advice to Councillors on carrying out their duties and responsibilities when determining Planning Applications and considering planning matters. This additional guidance seeks to discharge this responsibility to a high standard.

**9.4.** Section 4 sets out that only Full Council will be responsible for *'adopting and amending the Authority's Code of Conduct for members and other codes and protocols comprising the ethical framework.'* This guidance falls within the remit of this responsibility.

**10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no capital or revenue implications arising from this report at this stage.

**11. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

Appropriate guidance frameworks and enhanced decision making frameworks help to ensure good governance of the Council and therefore reduce risk of poor practice or unlawful decision making.

**12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

**12.1.** In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

**12.2.** There are no equalities implications associated with this report.

**13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS**

The Social Value Act and "go local" requirements do not apply to this report.

**14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this report

**15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

There will be no impact.

**16. APPENDICES**

**16.1** Appendix 1 – Planning Control Committee additional guidance

**17. CONTACT OFFICERS**

**17.1** Isabelle Alajooz: Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer  
[Isabelle.Alajooz@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:Isabelle.Alajooz@north-herts.gov.uk).

**17.2** Nigel Smith: Director of Place  
[Nigel.Smith@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:Nigel.Smith@north-herts.gov.uk)

**18. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

**18.1** none

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## **PLANNING CONTROL COMMITTEE – ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE**

### **Introduction:**

The aim of this additional guidance is to supplement the Members Planning Code of Good Practice which can be found in the following link: [Microsoft Word - CONSTITUTION - Sections 1-18 final 22.5.25.docx](#) which forms part of the Council's ethical framework.

This should be read in conjunction with the Members' Code of Conduct and the Protocol on Councillor- Officer Relations. The purpose of this guidance is to provide additional advice on the standards to be applied specifically in relation to planning matters. The key purpose of Planning is to proactively manage development in the wider public interest.

This note does *not* replace or otherwise affect the ability of Community Forums to receive any presentations from developers, their agents and / or Council officers, ask questions and provide comments accordingly under Section 9.7.6 of the Constitution.

### **1. Planning Control Committee**

The Terms of Reference can be found in the constitution at Section 8 ([Council constitution | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#))

The Planning Control Committee (PCC or 'the Committee') exercises those functions of the local planning authority not delegated to the Director: Place. The Director: Place may refer a matter to the Planning Control Committee for determination or consideration if the application is controversial or of significant public interest or is likely to have a significant impact on the environment.

### **2. The Committee's role in decision making**

The role of the Committee is to review and determine significant or controversial planning applications.

There are two distinct routes to the Committee in the decision-making process:

- Matters being 'called in' by members for consideration by the committee following noting on the application list
  
- A planning application which is delegated to the committee under the constitutional Terms of Reference

### **3. Call in of decisions by Members:**

The process in respect of Member call-ins can be found at paragraph 8.4.5.

It is stated that the Committee shall determine:

...

(c) any other planning application, application for advertisement consent, listed building consent or conservation area consent where:

(ii) a parish or town council has submitted a written opinion contrary to the recommendation of the Director: Place:

A. which is a valid material planning consideration in the opinion of the Director: Place; and

B. provided that the written opinion of the parish or town council is supported in writing by at least one Ward Member within five working days of the Ward Member being notified of the representation.

(iii) within three (3) weeks of the matter appearing in the weekly lists of applications a Member requests in writing the matter to be determined by the Committee:

A. detailing the reasons, which in the opinion of the Development and Conservation Manager and the Chair of the Planning Control Committee are based upon one or more valid material planning considerations; *and*

B. detailing the reasons that the matter is in the wider public interest

It is worth highlighting that the constitution also sets out the following:

- Parish meetings do not have this right set out in (ii) above.
- A Member with an Other Registrable Interest (ORI), or non-Registrable Interest (NRI) and/ or Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (DPI) must not be involved in the request to referral to Committee. In a single Member Ward, another District Councillor can request referral. If the Ward Member sits on the Planning Control Committee they can ask/ nominate another Member to make the referral/ act as Ward Advocate
- In a single Member Ward or where a Members has an ORI or DPI they can ask/ nominate another Member to make the referral/ act as Ward Advocate. They can only do so, providing they have no interests/ and have not demonstrated bias, or are seen to have pre-determined the matter.

Planning decisions should be made impartially with sound planning judgement.

If a Member has identified a matter on the planning application list which they would like to go before the Committee, they must give careful consideration to the increased work load of the committee in hearing and deliberating these matters. There is also an increased officer cost in time spent in preparing a report to the Committee for a decision which would otherwise be undertaken under Delegated powers. Before submitting the request, Members should discuss their concerns with the Development and Conservation Manager or the case officer.

Members should uphold the overarching principals of planning decisions ensuring that they are not pressurised by residents to bring matters to the Committee where there are no justifiable **planning** reasons, taking into consideration both local and national planning policy. If such reasons **do not exist** then Members should not have a matter 'called in'.

Members are reminded of the constitutional requirement in section 8 that:

**Where a Member makes a request for an application to be called in, they should attend the relevant Committee meeting to present their reasons/grounds to the Committee.**

**If they are unable to attend the relevant Committee meeting the Member must arrange for another member to present on their behalf or provide a written statement presenting their reasons/grounds.**

#### **4. Decision making:**

When planning applications are reported to Committee, the report will contain an Officer recommendation as to whether planning permission should be granted or refused.

Members are entitled to bring their own judgment to bear on planning applications and to make a decision contrary to Officer recommendation **but** it is important that such decisions are taken on sound planning grounds and produce substantive and defensible evidence to support the decision in all respects which will withstand scrutiny at a possible appeal (if planning permission is refused) or if the decision is referred to the Local Government Ombudsman.

Members should bear in mind their overriding duty is to the whole community, not just to the people in their Ward and, taking account of the need to make decisions impartially, they should not favour, or appear to favour any persons, business or locality irrespective of other considerations.

The Planning Advisory service provides some additional useful advice for councillors and officers making planning decisions, called Probity in Planning (December 2019).

## **5. Pre Application Discussions:**

The National Planning Policy Framework recognises the value of and encourages Pre-Application discussions between Local Planning Authorities and developers and Members can also encourage the use of this to reduce the pressure they may experience from members.

The NPPF notes that the more issues that can be resolved at pre-application stage, the greater the benefits, and exhorts Local Planning Authorities to encourage developers to take up any pre-application services offered.

As a general principle, Members should, where appropriate, **seek to encourage** promoters of development schemes to **engage in the Pre-Application process**.

Promoters of development schemes wishing to engage in Pre-Application discussions will be advised that:-

(a) if they wish to secure Member input into the Pre-Application discussions they can request that the Ward members attend a meeting with a Planning Officer present.

(b) although (subject to the Environmental Information Regulations Act and any other relevant legislation) the Council will respect the confidentiality of information which the scheme promoter makes clear is disclosed in confidence, Members will have access to Council files on Pre-Application discussions.

(c) If a Member wishes to express their views on Pre-Application discussions they may set out those views in writing sent to the relevant Planning Officer who will place a copy of the communication from the Member on the Pre Application file.

Members should be aware that such comments may in due course become publicly available. Members should not disclose any confidential information or documents held on Pre Application files other than to another Member or to an officer of the Council.

To ensure that decisions remain impartial, it will be made **clear** at pre-application meetings that:

- Officers' initial views and advice are given on a without prejudice basis which will be consistent with the provisions of the current adopted Council policy (unless there are clear material considerations that would justify consideration of a development contrary to policy;)

- no decisions may be made or advice given which would bind or otherwise compromise the Planning Control Committee (or the senior Officer responsible for Planning if delegated to make the decision); and
- for all pre-application meetings, a note of the discussion (not a formal advice note) will be taken by the Planning Officer, including details of those present, and will be made available for public inspection subject to the usual rules about access to information.

At least one appropriate Planning Officer will be present at all such meetings. Members may, following discussion with the appropriate Planning Officer, take part in organised post-submission meetings with applicants or other parties.

If Members do engage in pre-application discussions with developers they should observe the rules on lobbying. However North Herts encourages appropriate Member engagement in the pre application process. This assists in responding to communications from residents in an informed manner (subject to the advice on confidentiality above).

## **6. Members Briefing:**

The introduction of member briefings at North Herts will assist in reducing the length of the Committee and also the risk of appeals. These are separate to the Chairs procedural briefing held prior to the PCC meeting.

It is essential that Members should understand that an **informal briefing is not the Committee meeting** and therefore no decisions or agreements will or should be taken at the briefing.

The informal briefing is essentially a fact-finding exercise to allow Members to understand more about the proposal **before** an application is submitted to the council, once an application has been submitted to the Council **or** before formal consideration of the scheme at the Committee.

Members can ask questions about the scope of the proposal and about any issues they do not understand. It is **not a forum for debate** or for stating opinions about the application as a whole and not for the Committee Members to declare how they will vote at the formal meeting.

Whilst Members can begin to form views about the scheme and certain aspects of it, it is important at this stage for members **not to form and express firm views** or to decide how they will vote at the Committee meeting. If they do so, they will not be able to take part in the Committee consideration and determination of the application as they will be deemed to have predetermined the application and will have closed their minds.

The meeting is not a public meeting. The primary audience for briefings will be Members who are likely to sit on the determining Committee. However, briefings may be open to other (or all) Members including, but not limited to, Committee

substitutes, ward members and members of the Council's internal Strategic Planning Project Board.

Formal minutes or notes of the meeting **will not be made or published** as this is not a formal committee meeting and no decisions will have been taken. A record will be kept of the fact that the meeting took place and who attended the meeting and general topics/subject areas will be noted on the application record.

Although attendance by Members will be encouraged, non-attendance at informal briefings will not prevent their subsequent participation in deciding an application when it comes before the Committee.

Facilitation of the Briefings will be by the planning team and in all cases at least two planning officers will be in attendance to deliver the presentation and address questions raised by Members

The Members briefing will be used to enable Members to bring matters to be discussed **prior** to a committee decision making and can also be used for members to discuss matters which they seek to call in.

## **7. Site Visit Protocol:**

A decision to carry out an organised, accompanied site visit may be made where a proposal is contentious or complex and the impact is difficult to visualise or assess from the plans or any supporting presentation, including photographs taken by officers.

The visit is intended to enable Members to gain knowledge of the proposal and its physical context. The purpose of the site visit is to obtain information relevant to the determination of the application only. The decision should not be arbitrary, unfair or be used as a lobbying device.

Site visits can, however, cause delay and additional cost, so should only be used where the expected benefit is clear and substantial and in accordance with the criteria set out in this protocol. The visit can assist in understanding

- the granular details of a site where development is planned;
- the details of the surrounding area such as levels and proximity to other buildings; and
- issues raised by residents and others about the plans that need to be experienced such as noise/pollution/smells near the site

This advice does not preclude Members from undertaking unaccompanied site visits (for any application) for their own information where the application site and / or key receptors can be viewed from publicly accessible vantage points such as public highway or rights of way.

### Requests for a Site Visit:

A site visit request will need to be made in writing unless it has been deemed necessary by the Development and Conservation Manager in consultation with the Chair. It can be made in one of two ways:

#### i) Pre Committee:

Site visits should usually take place prior to Planning Control Committee to support expedient decision-making.

If a site visit is conducted prior to the item being heard at the Planning Control Committee then the item cannot be again deferred for a further site visit unless there are new planning matters to be considered on the site (see advice below).

A site visit will be arranged:

- If before a planning application is put on the Planning Control Committee Agenda the Development and Conservation Manager and the Chair agree that a Planning Control Committee site visit should be conducted sometime before that Committee meeting.
- For all sites of more than 200 homes
- Where requested in writing by at least 4 members of the Planning Control Committee
- Where a Ward Advocate who has called-in an application or otherwise intends to speak at Planning Control Committee in this capacity considers that PCC should visit the site and at least one of the criteria above is satisfied in support of this request

#### ii) At a Planning Control Committee

Any Planning Control Committee Member may propose that a decision on an application be deferred to allow a site visit to take place. If seconded and voted upon by a majority of Members, a site visit will take place.

Members proposing a site visit must state planning reasons for visiting the site and identify how / why the pre-meeting site visit protocols set out above were not utilised and are not sufficient to allow a decision to proceed. This will assist the Committee in determining the proposal to defer. These reasons will be recorded in the minutes.

If an application is deferred for a site visit then the site visit will form part of the formal meeting. Attendance at the site visit is required in order to be eligible to vote at any subsequent Committee meeting(s) where the application is considered.

A site visit should not be used as an opportunity to defer consideration or determination of an application. Any proposal to defer a decision at Planning Control Committee to allow a site visit to occur should be wholly exceptional and will require clear justification, seconding and voting upon by a majority of Members.

### Practical Arrangements for the site visit

The site visit may take place at any reasonable time during any working day (including the day of the Committee) before the Committee meeting at which it is proposed to determine the application.

The circumstances where attendance at the site visit will be mandatory are set out above. In all other cases, a site visit should be attended by all members of the Committee wherever possible. The appropriate Council officers will attend the site visit. This would include the Planning Officer and may on occasion include other officers who may be required to provide specialist advice and information relevant to the application.

The applicant will be notified of the date and time of the site visit and if it is proposed to enter onto private land as part of the site visit, it will be necessary to obtain permission from the landowner first.

A site visit is ordinarily to be attended only by Officers and Members of the Committee or substitutes.

### Procedure at the site visit

The Planning Officer will explain the proposal to members and provide a summary of the objections and should confirm that the site visit is being undertaken in accordance with the this guidance.

The Chair, or any nominated substitute, will be responsible for the overall oversight and conduct of site visits and will formally open and close the organised site visit.

Members can ask any questions concerning the proposal to the respective officer(s) in attendance, such questions should be limited to factual clarification on the application only and should not provide comment on the merits of the application.

In the event that anyone other than Officers or Members of the Committee is in attendance, the Chair or Planning Officer (as appropriate) will inform those attending the site visit that they should not approach or attempt to speak to or engage with any member or officer of the Council about the application during the site visit and that this is not an opportunity for lobbying, representations, public address or debate.

In order to ensure transparency of public dealing by members, members shall keep together as a group and shall not engage individually in discussion with any local members, applicants, objectors and other interested parties present at the site visit.

Members should not express an opinion on the planning application or on its merits (or otherwise) at the site visit. Members should be mindful at all times of the need to avoid allegations of predetermination or bias, or the fettering of the Council's discretion in relation to the application.

No hospitality may be accepted by members and officers from any party present at the site visit.

A note shall be taken by the Planning Officer of any significant events occurring during the site visit which will include the names of those in attendance which will be available for public inspection.

Procedure at Committee following the site visit

Officers will provide a brief update to members of any significant additional information or issues raised at the site visit.

Following the update, members of the Committee who were not able to attend the site visit should consider whether they have sufficient information before them to enable them to take part in determining the application and, if not, should ask the case officer for further information to ensure they are sufficiently informed or take no part in the deliberation and should abstain from the vote on the proposals.

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**COUNCIL  
23 APRIL 2026**

**PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

## **TITLE OF REPORT: NOTICE OF MOTIONS**

The following motion has been submitted, due notice of which has been given in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.12.

### **Verge and Footway Parking Protection Orders in Letchworth Garden City**

To be moved by Councillor Sean Prendergast and seconded by Councillor Tina Bhartwas:

Council notes that:

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:

- 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.
- 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.
- Ensure that any proposals are subject to appropriate consultation with residents. To report back to Members with proposals for implementation.

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**TITLE OF REPORT: NOTICE OF MOTIONS**

The following motion has been submitted, due notice of which has been given in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.12.

**Protection of North Herts Chalk Streams**

To be moved by Councillor Tom Tyson and seconded by Councillor Louise Peace:

Council notes that:

1. 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.
2. South Cambs MP Pippa Heylings is currently sponsoring a Chalk Streams (UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site) Bill in parliament<sup>1</sup>. 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.
3. 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.
4. The draft NPPF (2025)<sup>2</sup> 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.
5. 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.
6. 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<sup>3</sup> 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 (see details below).
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.

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<sup>1</sup> Hansard entry for first reading of the Bill [Chalk Streams \(UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site\) - Hansard - UK Parliament](#)

<sup>2</sup> Draft NPPF December 2025 [National Planning Policy Framework: draft text for consultation](#)

<sup>3</sup> Chapter 04 of the Chilterns Chalk Stream Planning Guidance [Chilterns-Chalk-Stream-Planning-Guidance-May25.pdf](#) deals with planning policy and specifically contains the following checklist requiring the Local Plan to:

- Name the chalk streams present within the area District in the plan
- Identify chalk streams on the policies map or map showing sites of ecological value
- Make specific reference to chalk streams within policies relating to the ~~Chilterns National Landscape~~ Local Plan area
- Make specific reference to the unique nature of chalk streams in policies relating to water quality and quantity
- Include protection and enhancement of chalk streams in criteria-based policies relating to the natural environment
- Include specific protection or enhancement measures for chalk streams in site allocations policies
- Ensure specific reference to the protection of habitats and species related to chalk streams