

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

SOUTHERN RURAL COMMITTEE

**MEETING HELD IN THE FOUNDATION HOUSE, ICKNIELD WAY, LETCHWORTH
GARDEN CITY ON THURSDAY, 5 OCTOBER, 2017 AT 7.30 PM**

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors Councillor David Barnard (Chairman), John Bishop, Jane Gray, Harry Spencer-Smith and Claire Strong*

In Attendance:

Andrew Mills (Service Manager - Grounds Maintenance), Colin Broadhurst (Licensing Officer), Stuart Izzard (Communities Manager) and Hilary Dineen (Committee and Member Services Officer)

Also Present:

At the commencement of the meeting approximately 11 members of the public.

24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Steve Hemingway, Cathryn Henry and Terry Tyler.

25 MINUTES - 6 JULY 2017

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 6 July 2017 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

26 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

There were no notifications of other business.

27 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

- (1) The Chairman reminded everyone that, in accordance with Council policy, the meeting was being audio recorded;
- (2) Members were 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 Chairman 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 which requires they leave the room under Paragraph 7.4 of the Code of Conduct, can speak on the item, but must leave the room before the debate and vote;
- (3) The Chairman advised that the next meeting of this Committee, due to be held on 30 November 2017 would be the annual pre-Christmas meeting. He asked Members if they had any suggestions for venues.

Members considered whether to meet off-site for every meeting, but agreed that the current practice of only meeting off-site for the pre-Christmas meeting should be continued.

Members suggested that investigations be made into the availability of Knebworth Village Hall and St Ippolyts Village Hall for the next meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED: That the Committee and Member Services Officer be requested to identify a suitable venue for the next meeting of this Committee, taking into account the suggestions of this Committee to consider Knebworth Village Hall and St Ippolyts Village Hall.

28 COUNTRYSIDE MANAGEMENT SERVICE

Charlotte Carter, Countryside Management Service (CMS), advised that CMS was part of Hertfordshire County Council's Environment Department. It had been in operation for 42 years and was part funded by District and Borough Councils.

CMS worked with communities in Hertfordshire helping them to care for their local environment.

Activities could be divided into three areas being:

The Land Management Team

The Land Management Team was responsible for producing Management Plans for Hertfordshire's green infrastructure such as nature reserves, green spaces, redundant railway lines, rivers and the rights of way network.

They worked to secure funding from external sources including Lottery Funding, development off-setting and landfill communities cap.

The Land Management Team also managed contracts to manage habitat and access improvement works in green spaces.

The Communities Team

Project officers from the Communities Team worked with volunteers to conduct many of the actions contained in the Management Plan, including habitat and access improvement works.

Hertfordshire Health Walks

The Hertfordshire Health Walk project officers co-ordinated approximately 300 Health Walk Leaders, who then enabled thousands of walkers to enjoy their local green spaces therefore gaining the mental and health wellbeing benefits of experiencing the outdoors and being active.

Volunteering and working with the local community was central to the work undertaken by CMS.

Councillors were kept informed of the work undertaken by CMS by attending meetings such as this one.

CMS conducted guided walks around the sites that they managed, which were open to Councillors and usually open to the general public, which helped them to inform people about the work that was happening in their green spaces and gain some understanding about the importance of the site for ecology as well as the historical context of the site.

CMS had three groups of midweek volunteers who undertook conservation activities such as installing boardwalks, cutting back scrub, and planting trees, including a group that visited all of the North Herts owned sites.

There were 25 "Friends of" groups who were the eyes and ears regarding the green spaces, which was a great help to the landowners, which was usually the Local Authority. These groups also undertook some practical work as well.

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The rights of way volunteers undertook surveys of the footpaths and bridleways across the District, assess the condition and flag up any work required and undertake some of the work required.

Management Plans were developed using a set process that involved the community during the development of the plan.

The Green Space Action Plans were map based plans which set out the aims and objectives for the management of a site over a 5 year period and detailed how those aims and objectives would be achieved.

The development of each plan started with a briefing document, which would be sent out to Councillors. This document outlined the background of and the core aspirations for the site and gave stakeholders the opportunity to feed into the Management Plan by making comments about the content, which would be considered when developing the draft Management Plan.

The draft Management Plan gave more detail about how the aspirations mentioned in the briefing document would be achieved. This document would then be sent out for consultation, which was available to members of the public as well as stakeholders.

The final Management Plan was drawn up following that consultation and therefore shouldn't contain any information that wasn't already known about.

This process was a great way to get people involved and to help them understand what was happening in their local environment.

In respect of Pryors Wood, Great Ashby, the Management Plan had been through the briefing stage and one of the main aspirations for this site was to integrate and fully connect Priors Wood into the wider District Park.

This site was previously managed by the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, but was now under the management of NHDC and one of the aims was to make it clear to visitors that they were on an NHDC owned site and the connection with the District Park.

Members asked how they worked with the different District throughout Hertfordshire

Ms Carter advised that CMS worked in partnership with the District and Borough Councils and worked together with them to develop the management plans

The Service Manager – Grounds Maintenance advised that CMS was one of NHDC's key partners for maintaining the more environmentally sensitive sites and were a resource of technical expertise.

The Grounds Maintenance Team were urban park managers and they were very reliant on CMS regarding the more sensitive maintenance of green areas.

Green Space Action Plans were in place for many areas including Oughtonhead Common, Purwell Meadows and Norton Common and these could be accessed via the NHDC website. These demonstrated the types of work being undertaken including boundary maintenance and the introduction of the grazing of cattle.

NHDC was working to be more environmentally friendly in the work undertaken, whilst also managing the costs. Involving the public and volunteers was a key factor and CMS was a key partner in managing that process.

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Councillor Gray, Executive Member for Leisure, endorsed the work undertaken by CMS and the partnership working between them and NHDC Grounds Maintenance. She informed Members that the Great Ashby Distract Park was a wonderful area to visit.

Members suggested that CMS be requested to organise a walk through Pryors Wood and the District Park and that all Councillors from NHDC and Great Ashby Community Council be invited.

Ms Carter advised that CMS undertook many guided walks and that some of these were combined with special events such as the introduction of grazing at a site.

A Member commented that, particularly on Oughtonhead Common, the introduction of grazing cattle had meant the installation of unsightly barbed wire fencing, which had been placed in very visible areas rather than in tree or bush lines that may reduce the visual impact. She also commented that the river had changed over the years to the extent that people could no longer get to the water's edge.

Ms Carter advised that the fencing had been placed in that location in order to increase the amount of grassland under favourable management.

The Service Manager-Grounds Maintenance advised that a lot of public consultation had been undertaken regarding the placement of the fencing and that consultation highlighted that there was some concern expressed that people would be enclosed within the cattle grazing area. The current location of the fencing enabled the maximum area for grazing, whilst taking into account the comments received.

More cattle would be placed on Oughtonhead Common and as the effect of that grazing takes place, the ecology of the area would change.

In respect of the rivet running alongside Woolgrove Road, a Member commented that this was now covered with wild watercress and the water was no longer visible.

The Service Manager – Grounds Maintenance informed Members that the project currently being undertaken in that location was to constrict the width of the water course and allowing the vegetation to increase was deliberate. The river passing Walsworth Common was a chalk stream, one of only 200 in the world, and was very ecologically sensitive. The watercourse had become so wide that there was very slow or no water flow, this affected the purpose of the chalk stream which was to create and clean the riverbed to expose the chalk. The flow could only be increased by narrowing the width of the stream and this had been achieved by creating flow deflectors to attempt to recreate the meandering effect of the stream. One of the benefits of the vegetation was that, in periods of heavy rainfall or flood, the flow of water would be slowed allowing it to percolate into the surrounding ground water table therefore helping to reduce the risk of flooding downstream.

The habitat in that area was improving and diversifying and the stream will no longer be a wide stagnant pool of water with no life, but will become a flowing watercourse that meanders through the riverbed and be full of life and diversity.

A walk and talk event was held sometime ago in this area and residents expressed that they were very keen to encourage biodiversity and it was pleasing to be able report that a few fish have already returned to the water course and there had been evidence of water voles and otters. This area would continue to be managed and cleaned out when required.

A Member noted the return of fauna in the area and that this was continuing to be encouraged and queried whether there was any regime of predator management. In respect of litter on Oughtonhead Common he queried whether there was a litter picking programme,

The Service Manager- Grounds Maintenance advised that John O'Connors litter picked along the bridle way, reports of illegal camping, barbeques etc were responded to and monitoring regimes were increased during school holiday periods. The team also worked closely with volunteers, without whom the site would deteriorate. The volunteer did an amazing amount of work and were fastidious.

In respect of predator management, the water course was being monitored for mink, which so far had not been sighted. If mink were sighted, there was a process in place to deal with them.

The Chairman thanked Ms Carter for her interesting presentation.

RESOLVED: That the Countryside Management Service be requested to organise a walk around Pryors Wood and the District Park and that all Councillors from NHDC and Great Ashby Community Council be invited to attend.

REASON FOR DECISION: To promote the work done by the Countryside Management Service in North Hertfordshire.

29 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - CODICOTE FOOTBALL CLUB

Mr Craig Rathbone, Codicote Football Club, thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a verbal presentation in support of their application for grant funding.

Mr Rathbone informed Members that Codicote Football Club currently played in Step 6 of the Football Pyramid. They moved back to play in Codicote last season having put in a stand and floodlighting following fundraising efforts.

The Club was now quite substantial, having moved back with just a senior side and now having introduced under 18, under 17, under 16, under 15, under 12, under 8 and under 7 teams, all using the same recreation ground. One team had to play away as they couldn't be supported on the pitch.

As well as the Codicote teams, the pitch was rented to Stevenage Ladies Football Club who played on Sunday afternoons.

In 2015 the Club commissioned a report regarding the playing surface from Cranfield University who put forward a number of recommendations regarding fertilisation, grass cutting and verti-draining. This report had been submitted to the Parish Council, Sport England and the English Cricket Board.

The football surface had been looked after by the Parish Council however, due to understandable constraints, the work necessary to provide a good surface had not been undertaken by them.

There was a senior pitch and a junior pitch on site and the application for grant funding related mainly to the senior pitch, although the equipment requested could be used in the junior pitch as well.

The Club had a small proactive committee who were keen to take on the maintenance of the pitches and to build the club.

The Football Association had undertaken further ground assessment and it was hoped that grant funding could also be sought from them.

The equipment required to maintain the ground to an acceptable level included a light roller, a mobile sprayer, and ultimately a sit on tractor and grass cutting equipment.

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In response to questions from Members, Mr Rathbone advised that they had been playing at Hertford Town and Gosling Stadium in Welwyn Garden City. In respect of the youth teams, during the summer they trained at the ground in Codicote, and during the winter they trained on an artificial surface.

Members of the Club paid membership fees, which contributed towards equipment and sponsorship helped with match strips.

A funding application had been made to London Luton Airport, but this had been refused, mainly due to the Social Club having received considerable funding in previous years

The Chairman thanked Mr Rathbone for his presentation.

30 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - KNEBWORTH YOUTH PROJECT

Ms Lynda Brookes, Knebworth Youth Project, thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a verbal presentation in support of their application for grant funding.

Ms Brookes informed Members that she was a member of the Knebworth Youth Project Management Committee and that the Project had been running for almost 10 years.

The project was set up following consultation with the teenagers on the village as part of the Parish Plan preparations.

The project met twice a week with Friday's being a lively session for 10 – 13 year olds and Thursday were for the older age group, which currently consisted of 15 – 20 young people, mainly boys.

The Project was well attended and well supported by two paid youth workers and a team of 8 volunteers working on a rota basis.

They were relatively stable financially in that the overheads were covered and staff costs were paid by grant funding from Knebworth Village Trust and a bequest managed by Trinity Church. The premises were donated by Trinity Church and Knebworth Parish Council.

The sessions were free to attend in order to keep it as inclusive as possible, although they did invite donations. This ethos meant that there was a mixed social group attending each session.

The Project was currently struggling with the cost of providing activities for the evening sessions and were requesting grant funding to support the weekly activities as well as possibly provide dance and sports instructors. There was also a need for volunteers to attend training such as first aid.

Members asked whether there were any aspects that could be charged for such as refreshments, which would help support the Project.

Ms Brookes advised that a tuck shop was operated on a Friday, which made a small profit.

Members recommended that the Project also apply to their County Councillor for grant funding.

The Chairman thanked Ms Brookes for her presentation.

31 CONSULTATION IN RELATION TO THE PROPOSED STREET TRADING POLICY 2018-2025

The Licensing Officer presented a report in respect of the proposed Street Trading Policy 2018-2025. He advised that consultation had commenced on a revised Policy, part of which was to seek the views of Area Committees.

He acknowledged that the Street Trading Policy did not affect any of the villages in the Southern Rural area, but was keen to discover whether street trading caused problems in any of the rural areas and whether there were any areas that would fall within the remit of the Policy.

By way of background, the Licensing Officer explained that the Council had adopted the appropriate Street Trading legislation in 2005. In Street Trading terms, a “street” was a road, footway or other areas to which the public had free access (eg. car parks, shopping arcades). Street Trading was the selling of goods that could be purchased and taken away at the time of purchase.

The Licensing Officer further explained that Charter Markets were exempt from Street Trading, as were shops that displayed some of their wares outside their frontages. Typically, Street Trading covered burger vans, ice cream vans, ad hoc markets and community events. In this latter regard, he stated that the revised Policy sought to continue to those parts of the existing Policy which provided encouragement for community events.

The Licensing Officer advised that the Council was able to designate streets as consent streets, where its consent was required to be able to trade within such streets; prohibited streets, where trading would not be permitted at any time; or not to designate at all. In 2005, the Council had chosen to designate as consent streets all streets within the District’s four main towns and the arterial roads which linked them. Village roads/streets had been excluded from such designation.

The Licensing Officer commented that the Policy did not contain any prohibited streets, but appended to it was a list of streets where consent would not normally be granted.

In respect of Advertising Boards (A Boards) and tables and chairs outside restaurants/cafes, the Licensing Officer confirmed that those matters did not fall within the remit of street trading, but were instead the responsibility of Hertfordshire County Council under the Highways Act 1980.

The Licensing Officer stated that the main objective of the Policy was to protect the public from unregulated street traders. The Policy also aimed to make things easier for community events to go ahead without having to go through the same process as commercial operators. Accordingly, it was possible for an annual Town Centre consent to be issued to an appropriate Town Centre organisation (such as a BID company or Community Events Forum), so that all community or commercial operators wishing to trade within the town could approach the Town Centre organisation for permission to use their annual consent. A cost could be levied on a commercial operator for use of the consent, with no charge for not-for-profit community organisations. This principal could be used in villages, if it was believed that there were problems that needed controlling through the Policy, whereby the Parish Council could hold a village consent if required.

Members queried whether the Parish Councils had been consulted regarding this Policy and questioned the stance, stated in the Policy, that an application for a street trading consent would normally be refused where the applicant had previously had a consent revoked.

The Licensing Officer advised that Parish Councils had not been consulted, but the Area Committees had. In respect of Paragraph 3.4.2 of the Policy, he would advise Members of the information in due course

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report be noted, and the following comment considered by the Licensing Officer in the final version of the proposed Street Trading Policy 2018-2025:
- (2) That the Licensing Officer be requested to inform Members of the rationale regarding Paragraph 3.4.2 of the Policy.

REASON FOR DECISION: To provide local input into the proposed Street Trading Policy 2018-2015.

32 GRANTS AND COMMUNITY UPDATE

The Communities Manager informed Members that applications for grant funding had been sparse this year and this had been evident across the whole of the District and asked Members to remind groups that grant funding was available.

He also reminded Members about the Capital Projects Fund that was available for groups to apply for sums between £10,000 and £50,000 for capital works.

Kimpton Dacre Rooms had already made an application, which had been successful and talks were being held with Pirton Village Hall and Holwell Village Hall.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the activities and schemes with which the Communities Manager has been involved with, as set out in the report, be noted;
- (2) That the budgetary expenditure, balances and carry forwards within the Area Committee Development Budget spreadsheet, as attached at Appendix 1 to the report, be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure that the Southern Rural Committee is kept informed of the work of the Communities Manager and to inform Members of the financial resources and current budgetary position.

33 GRANT APPLICATION - CODICOTE FOOTBALL CLUB

The Communities Manager advised that the Club finances were well managed and that they had been successful in getting grant funding for the stand and floodlighting.

The Area Committee had previously provided grant funding of £5,000 towards the floodlights in 2015 and a further £1,000 in March 2016 towards the cost of providing mobile shelters.

Members were keen to support Codicote Football Club and were particularly impressed by the number of youth teams playing as part of the Club and acknowledged that the emerging Playing Pitch Strategy relied on club facilities such as this to meet the objectives.

In light of the Grant Policy that restricted organisations from applying for funding every year, it was proposed and seconded that £1,250 be awarded to Codicote Football Club.

RESOLVED: That grant funding of £1,250 be awarded to Codicote Football Club from the 2017/18 Discretionary Budget towards the costs associated with the purchase of equipment requires to maintain the pitches..

REASON FOR DECISION: To improve services provided by local organisations and groups which are accessed by the community.

34 GRANT APPLICATION - KNEBWORTH YOUTH PROJECT

The Communities Manager advised that Knebworth Youth Project last received grant funding from this Committee of £500 in 2011.

The project was seeking grant funding towards the cost of activities during the two sessions held each week and training for volunteers.

He informed Members that Councillor Hemingway had requested that his Ward Budget of £500 be put towards this project and that there was £500 from the 2016/17 Ward Budget for Knebworth, which had not yet been allocated.

Members asked whether the Project undertook any fundraising initiatives.

The Communities Manager advised that no fundraising was undertaken, but the group did apply for grant funding from various sources.

Members acknowledged that the Youth Project was thriving and that they wished to support it and it was proposed and seconded that a total of £1,350 be awarded to the Knebworth Youth Project to be taken from the following budgets:

2017/18 Ward Budget – Councillor Hemingway	£500
2016/17 Ward Budget – Councillor Deakin-Davies	£500
2017/18 Discretionary Budget	£350

RESOLVED: That total grant funding of £1,350 be awarded to Knebworth Youth Project towards the cost of providing weekly activities and volunteer training to be taken from the following budgets:

2017/18 Ward Budget – Councillor Hemingway	£500
2016/17 Ward Budget – Councillor Deakin-Davies	£500
2017/18 Discretionary Budget	£350

REASON FOR DECISION: To improve services provided by local organisations and groups which are accessed by the community.

35 WARD MATTERS AND OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS - MEMBERS' REPORTS

There were no Member's reports regarding Ward matters or outside organisations.

The meeting closed at 9.10 pm

Chairman