

**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**SOUTHERN RURAL COMMITTEE**

**MEETING HELD AS A VIRTUAL MEETING  
ON THURSDAY, 4TH MARCH, 2021 AT 7.30 PM**

**MINUTES**

**Present:** *Councillors: Claire Strong (Chair), David Barnard, John Bishop, George Davies and Ian Moody*

**In Attendance:** *Claire Morgan (Community Engagement Team Leader) and William Edwards (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Louis Franklin (Customer Service Assistant)*

**Also Present:** *At the commencement of the meeting approximately 9 members of the public, including registered speakers.*

**34 WELCOME AND REMOTE/PARTLY REMOTE MEETINGS PROTOCOL SUMMARY**

*Audio Recording – 3 seconds.*

The Chair welcomed everyone to this virtual meeting of the Southern Rural Committee that was being conducted with Members and Officers at various locations, communicating via audio/video and online and advised that there was the opportunity for the public and press to listen and view proceedings.

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer undertook a roll call and gave advice regarding the following:

- Attendance;
- Live Streaming;
- Noise interference;
- Rules of Debate;
- Voting.

The Chair, Councillor Claire Strong, started the meeting proper.

**35 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

*Audio recording – 3 minutes 10 seconds.*

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Faye Frost, Lisa Nash and Sam North.

Councillors Terry Tyler and Steve Deakin-Davies were absent.

**36 MINUTES - JANUARY 2020 - DECEMBER 2020**

*Audio Recording – 3 minutes 29 seconds.*

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the Minutes of the Meetings of the Committee held on 8 January 2020, 25 June 2020, 29 October 2020, and 10 December 2020 be approved as a true record of the proceedings;
- (2) That the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer be authorised to apply the Chair's digital signature to the minutes approved above.

### **37 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS**

*Audio Recording – 4 minutes 20 seconds.*

There was no other business notified.

### **38 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

*Audio Recording - 4 minutes 35 seconds.*

- (1) The Chair welcomed those present at the meeting, especially those who had attended to give a presentation and the parish council representatives;
- (2) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded;
- (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 if members of the public wished to ask questions of the Hertfordshire Constabulary representative that they should be of a general region-wide nature and that specific local issues were best directed to their local Police Constable or Police Community Support Officer.

### **39 HERTFORDSHIRE CONSTABULARY**

*Audio Recording – 6 minutes 21 seconds.*

Sergeant Guy Westwood delivered a presentation on behalf of Hertfordshire Constabulary including:

- The Chief Inspector was now Jon Roche;
- The Safer Neighbourhood Inspector was James Lant, and the Detective Inspector was Angie Griffiths;
- The Hitchin Urban sergeant was Alan Clarke;
- Sergeant Guy Westwood was the Hitchin Rural sergeant;
- The rural area Police Constables were Johnie Streeter, Clare Wallace and Gary Pugsley;
- The rural area Police Community Support Officers were Heather Burrows and Stuart Stone;
- The team was going to be recruiting rural special constables in the future;
- Crimes in the rural area were typically underreported;
- 26% of all households in North Herts were signed up to the neighbourhood watch scheme;
- The Priority Setting Forum would open in a week to determine the policing priorities of the team;

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- The priorities were currently antisocial behaviour (including related drugs offences) in local parks, speeding in the St Paul's Walden and Kimpton areas, as well as crop damage, poaching and other damage to rural infrastructure;
- The crime statistics for the year 2020/21 compared to the same period 2019/20 were as follows:

#### Crime Overall

5693 crimes were reported in North Herts, down from 6987 crimes last year.

There had been a 3% increase in crimes reported in the Southern Rural area, with 896 reported up from 867.

#### Residential burglary

21 reported compared to 50 last year.

COVID regulations meant more people were staying at home reducing opportunity for this kind of crime to take place.

Residential burglary was a focus for the team.

#### Burglary (business and community)

25 reported compared to 32 last year.

#### Theft from vehicle

67 reported compared to 54 last year.

This was a 24% increase.

#### Personal robbery

3 up from 2 last year.

#### Offences against the person

A wide ambit of offences included making it hard to determine reasons for incidents

341 up from 336 last year

#### Criminal damage

Reporting had decreased contrary to expectations in view of lockdown boredom

96 compared to 111 last year.

#### Theft from Shop

Figures were up significantly county-wide this year.

Most of this increase was down to one location at the border of the team's area targeted by groups moving in from outside the region.

In the rural area there had been 79 reported incidents compared to 38 last year.

#### Drugs Offences

18 reported in the Rural area compared to 15 last year.

#### Aggravated crimes

4 reported up from 3 last year.

#### Domestic Abuse

Figures on these offences could not be broken down into urban/rural groups

There had been 1081 reports compared to 1201 last year

The team was still encouraging reports and had daily reviews from a dedicated Detective Sergeant to consider opportunities to encourage reports.

#### Anti-social Behaviour

Reports of anti-social behaviour including COVID-related conduct were up at 308 from 223 last year.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Ian Moody
- Councillor David Barnard
- Councillor George Davies
- Councillor John Bishop

In response to questions Sergeant Guy Westwood advised:

- The priority setting ECHO survey would be distributed online via the OWL system;
- Fly-tipping was a matter for Council officers to enforce but the police would assist where evidence relating to criminal offences, in particular drugs offences, could be gathered;
- Shift patterns meant it was difficult for PCs/PCSOs to cover every parish council meeting;
- The rural area was geographically disparate and with only 3 PCs and 2 PCSOs the team was limited in what it could do;
- Actionable intelligence leading to evidence of crimes was essential;
- Antisocial behaviour in Great Ashby District Park had been a big issue over the summer but had largely been resolved after the gates and car park were shut earlier in the day; reports to the police had dropped off;
- As lockdown restrictions ease the number of antisocial behaviour reports should decrease;
- Non-urgent reports should be directed to the 111 service, unless an offence was actively underway in which case 999 should be called.

The Chair thanked Sergeant Guy Westwood for his presentation.

#### **40 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - DOWN THE WOODS CIC**

*Audio recording – 43 minutes 30 seconds.*

Ms. Caroline Langley – Down the Woods CIC thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee in support of their grant application and gave a verbal presentation including:

- Down the Woods CIC provided outdoor education to the community and ran Within the Walls, a community garden project based in St. Paul's Walden Bury;
- They were seeking funding to provide forest school sessions for adults in the woods of the St Paul's Walden Estate;
- Outdoor education and forest school sessions developed self-esteem, transferable skills, mental health benefits, and preserved rural crafts;
- The plan was to provide sessions for 6 participants in Hitch Wood which the group had been allowed to use for free by the landowner;
- Sessions would focus on mindfulness, identifying nature, woodland and rural crafts, cooking over fires, and reintroducing participants back to social life.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor David Barnard

In response to questions Ms. Caroline Langley advised:

- The community garden run by the group was rented from the owners of the Hitch Wood area and access to a private section of the woods was being offered to them for free;
- The forest school would propagate a no-trace ethos and prevent damage to the woodland;

- Previous grants given to Down the Woods CIC had been spent on the community garden and a summer house shelter;
- Members were welcome to visit the project when they were able.

The Chair thanked Ms. Caroline Langley for her presentation.

#### 41 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - HOLWELL PARISH COUNCIL

*Audio Recording – 49 minutes 13 seconds.*

Ms Anne Warner – Holwell Parish Council thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee in support of their grant application and gave a verbal presentation including:

- Holwell Parish Council was applying for a grant of £744 to purchase a new noticeboard costing a total of £1444 plus VAT as the present board has fallen in to disrepair;
- The parish council had researched providers and selected a board made by Green Barns which uses hard wearing recycled materials;
- The board would have windows, one with a lock for Parish Council notices and another left open for general community use;
- The board would be situated on Holwell Road and the consensus of parishioners was that they would continue to use a community noticeboard once the old one was replaced;
- The Parish Council was using £400 of its own funds and Councillor David Barnard had contributed £300 from the Hertfordshire County Council locality budget.

The Chair thanked Ms Anne Warner for her presentation.

#### 42 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - OFFLEY & STOPSLEY CRICKET CLUB

*Audio Recording – 51 minutes 58 seconds.*

Mr Mark Tattersall – Offley & Stopsley Cricket Club thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee in support of their grant application and gave a verbal presentation including:

- He was the Chair of Offley & Stopsley Cricket Club;
- The club was a community team formed after a merger 23 years ago of two longstanding clubs; Stopsley had been playing for over 100 years and Offley Cricket Club was founded in 1923;
- The application was for £1000 towards the refurbishment of the cricket pavilion including electrical work;
- Youth development was at the heart of the club's goals and through persistent canvassing and recruitment over 40% of the club were now based or had been based in the village of Offley;
- The club was maintained by the work of volunteers;
- The pavilion used to host a youth club until roof leaks resulted in a flood;
- Funds were raised from club fees and events but had been stymied by COVID restrictions and the club did not feel able to charge its membership fee last year;
- The cost of works was quoted at around £3500, £1500 of which the club was providing itself with a further £1000 given by Offley Parish Council;
- The club was hoping to have a practice session on April 2<sup>nd</sup> and the Committee were welcome to come.

The following Members asked questions or contributed to the discussion:

- Councillor John Bishop
- Councillor David Barnard

In response to questions the Community Engagement Team Leader advised that the club had not received funding from NHDC since 2014 and this application met the grants policy criteria.

The Chair thanked Mr Mark Tattersall for his presentation.

#### **43 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - OFFLEY PARISH COUNCIL**

*Audio Recording – 59 minutes 10 seconds.*

Mr David Sample – Offley Parish Council thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee in support of their grant application and gave a verbal presentation including:

- Offley Parish Council was responsible for Offley, Cockernhoe, Mangrove Green and Tea Green;
- The parish council had put together some funds and in 2018 purchased equipment to make a small play area on Elmtree Community Field after the land had been donated to the parish council by North Herts Homes;
- The application was for £2000 to purchase additional play equipment;
- The parish council was providing funding of £8500 from its funds and reserve;
- The equipment installed in 2018 had been well received and the parish council had been looking to acquire more since then.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor David Barnard
- Councillor Claire Strong

In response to questions Mr David Sample advised:

- The parish council had not applied to the airport committee fund as the application process was prohibitive;
- The parish council hoped that because they were providing the bulk of the funding that Members would be minded to help them across the line;
- Details of play equipment proposed had been circulated and included a model land rover and other playground installations.

The Chair thanked Mr David Sample for his presentation.

#### **44 GRANTS & COMMUNITY UPDATE**

*Audio Recording – 1 hour 3 minutes.*

The Community Engagement Team Leader presented the report entitled Grants & Community Update along with Appendix 2 and drew attention to the following:

- This was the last meeting of the Southern Rural committee this financial and civic year;
- The committee started the year with funding of £8700 and had awarded £3901 leaving £4799 available;
- The grants requested this evening totalled £4634;
- If Members were minded to approve all grants as outlined in the report there would be a carry over of £165 to next year's budget.

**RESOLVED:** That the actions taken by the Community Engagement team to promote greater community capacity and well-being for the Southern Rural area be endorsed.

**REASON FOR DECISION:**

- (1) To ensure the Committee is kept informed of the work of the work of the Community Engagement team
- (2) To inform Members of the financial resources available to the Committee. It draws attention to the current budgetary situation by assisting in the effective financial management of the Area Committee's budget. This ensures that all actions are performed in line with the Authority's Financial Regulations, the Council's Constitution, and the guidance of the existing Grants policy as agreed by Cabinet in January 2020.

**45 GRANT APPLICATION - DOWN THE WOODS CIC**

*Audio Recording – 1 hour 7 minutes.*

It was:

**RESOLVED:** That grant funding of £890 be awarded to Down the Woods CIC towards the cost of forest school sessions as outlined in paragraph 8.1.1 of the report entitled Grants & Community Update.

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

**46 GRANT APPLICATION - HOLWELL PARISH COUNCIL**

*Audio Recording – 1 hour 8 minutes.*

It was:

**RESOLVED:** That grant funding of £744 be awarded to Holwell Parish Council towards the cost of a replacement noticeboard as outlined in paragraph 8.1.2 of the report entitled Grants & Community Update.

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

**47 GRANT APPLICATION - OFFLEY & STOPSLEY CRICKET CLUB**

*Audio Recording – 1 hour 9 minutes.*

It was:

**RESOLVED:** That grant funding of £1000 be awarded to Offley & Stopsley Cricket Club towards the cost of upgrading the electrics of their cricket pavilion as outlined in paragraph 8.1.3 of the report entitled Grants & Community Update.

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

**48 GRANT APPLICATION - OFFLEY PARISH COUNCIL**

*Audio Recording – 1 hour 10 minutes.*

It was:

**RESOLVED:** That grant funding of £2000 be awarded to Offley Parish Council towards the cost of purchasing playground equipment as outlined in paragraph 8.1.4 of the report entitled Grants & Community Update.

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

#### 49 WARD MATTERS AND OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS - MEMBERS' REPORTS

*Audio recording – 1 hour 11 minutes.*

Members gave updates on the following Ward Matters and Outside Organisations:

##### Knebworth Town Twinning Association –

Councillor Lisa Nash advised the Committee that Knebworth Town Twinning Association had Kim Wilde and Hal Fowler become co-presidents as Lord Cobbold retired; the AGM would be on Sunday and online events including a quiz and a wine tasting had been held.

##### Knebworth Village Trust

Councillor Lisa Nash advised Knebworth Village Trust had paid for several laptops for Knebworth Village School for children without facilities at home for online learning.

##### Codicote Neighbourhood Plan

Councillor Ian Moody advised there was a lot of concern in the village regarding the Neighbourhood Plan awaiting the results of inspection in the next few months, with one of the sites in the village up for consideration before the NHDC Emerging Local Plan was finalised. Work was ongoing in the village to make sure site was not considered before the Inspector's report was released.

##### Codifest

Councillor Ian Moody advised that Codifest was coming back and that plans were underway.

##### Codicote Village Day

Councillor Ian Moody advised that Codicote Village Day had been delayed from July to 18 September and there was excitement in the village about hosting the village day and the return to normality.

##### Car Parking Charges Strategy

Councillor Claire Strong advised the Committee of proposals to raise parking charges and noted that the only parking location in the Southern Rural area was in Knebworth and unfortunately both Knebworth ward members were absent.

Knebworth Parish Council were subsidising the parking facilities in Knebworth up to £3500.

Councillor Claire Strong noted that it was primarily rural residents that had to travel in to towns by car and paid parking charges and asked whether the Committee would appreciate a more formal consultation on proposals in foregoing years.

The Committee felt informal consultation and discussion at other meetings or full Council was sufficient to comment on proposals.

##### Planning enforcement in the Kimpton area

Councillor John Bishop highlighted that work was being undertaken on a listed barn on the edge of the Kimpton which was still awaiting planning approval. Neighbours had alerted the



Planning department and no action had yet been taken. Works undertaken were a potential enforcement issue.

Councillor David Barnard advised that the Planning department were short staffed at present and under significant pressure.

## 50 DISCUSSION TOPIC - SOUTHERN RURAL COUNCILLOR SURGERIES

*Audio Recording – 1 hour 18 minutes.*

The Chair led a discussion on the topic of Councillor Surgeries for the Southern Rural area, including contributions from Members and members of the public present at the meeting.

Points raised included:

- The Executive Member for Community Engagement had asked whether Members of the Committee would appreciate a new Councillor Surgery to discuss constituents' issues in view of some comments made on social media and members of the public attending the Hitchin Councillors Surgery;
- The Royston Councillor's surgery is advertised as for 'Royston and surrounding area,';
- Parish council meetings in the rural areas were well attended and had good public participation;
- The geographic character and size of the Southern Rural area lends itself to a remote/virtual surgery and there could be public engagement benefits from continuing to conduct business remotely after restrictions are lifted;
- Members were able to attend many more parish council meetings now that they were being conducted remotely and members of the public know that they can raise issues with their parish councils;
- The councillors surgery in Hitchin could very easily become the Hitchin & Rural Surgery;
- When it was held in person many residents from the surrounding villages who travelled in to Hitchin market would make contact with Councillors there;
- An additional surgery would cost the Council in officer time and funding;
- Issues facing constituents were often concerned with the use of the town and a joint surgery would encourage collaboration between town and rural Councillors.

The Chair advised that she would write to the Executive Member for Community Engagement to advise them of the Committee's view.

The Chair invited members of the public attending from their respective parish councils to suggest topics for discussion by the Committee that might be of interest to them. The following topics were suggested:

- Fly-tipping and police matters
- Littering and environmental action days

The Chair advised that discussions had been had about a town talk style forum before or after formal committee meetings and noted that this was the last meeting of the civic year.

The Chair wished good luck to any Members standing for or involved in elections this year.

The meeting closed at 9.10 pm

Chair