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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

SOUTHERN RURAL COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES
ON THURSDAY, 21ST OCTOBER, 2021 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Councillor Faye S Frost (Chair), Councillor George Davies (Vice-Chair), Ian Moody, Lisa Nash, Claire Strong and Mandi Tandi*

In Attendance: *Rebecca Coates (Community Protection Manager), John Marshall (Community Safety Team Leader), Claire Morgan (Community Engagement Team Leader) and William Edwards (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager).*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting approximately 5 members of the public, including registered speakers.*

63 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1:18

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors John Bishop, David Barnard, and Terry Tyler.

64 MINUTES - 24 JUNE 2021

Audio Recording – 1:42

Councillor Faye Frost proposed, Councillor Lisa Nash seconded and it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 24 June 2021 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair, with the following addendum:

At Minute 60: “The grant awarded previously by this Committee to Offley & Stopsley Cricket Club was for £2000, meaning that if a like award were to be made the amount should be increased by £500 only.”

65 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 5:27

There was no other business notified.

66 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 5:45

(1) The Chair welcomed those present at the meeting, especially those who had attended to give a presentation;

- (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.

67 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 6:48

Natalie Barton-Pye, Lucy Gallard and Neil Jay – Offley Allotment Association – thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee in support of their grant application and gave a presentation including:

- They were seeking a grant asking for funds to get running water installed on the allotment site
- The allotments in Offley had been around in their current location for about three years; previously, the plots were managed by the landlord.
- Earlier this year, the landlord approached the ploholders and asked if they would create an association, to manage the plots and pay a lease;
- The association became responsible for maintaining the site, collecting the rent, and making sure everything was maintained and safe on the site
- Plot holders did not have any access to running water. During the winter months, they have water collection facilities; however, they do not have a source of water that is communal on the site which during the summer months becomes an issue because they collect or store enough water.
- The allotment accommodates 31 plots, serving around 35 people and their families, and a school;
- Installing permanent water access would save around a tonne of CO2 a year, and would allow ploholders without vehicles to access water year round.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Faye Frost
- Councillor Lisa Nash
- Councillor Mandi Tandi

In response to questions the Offley Allotment Association advised:

- Plot rent was £18 a year for a half plot, or £30 for a full plot;
- The allotment association was unable to charge much more than that until running water and security could be provided;
- They were keen to keep rates low to ensure the allotments were accessible to people on low incomes;
- Fundraising events including a quiz night and a Christmas market were planned;
- £500 discretionary funding from the parish council had been secured;
- There were other flat costs associated with running the allotments including ground rent, insurance, and maintenance of communal areas;
- The landowners had provided some water troughs for water storage
- Funding from Affinity Water, the supplier, was no longer available;
- Any support the Committee could offer would be gratefully received, and funds were essential for the future success of the project; without water installed the association were concerned ploholders attracted to the site would lose crops and become disheartened with the project.

The Chair thanked the Offley Allotment Association for their presentation.

Parish Councillor Dr. Rebecca Riches-Duit – Little Wymondley Parish Council thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee in support of their grant application, and gave a presentation including:

- She had agreed to take on the task of investigating the cost of purchasing and installing a new defibrillator for the parish and seeking grant funding;
- The Parish Council did not have sufficient finances of its own to achieve this due to competing financial priorities partly related to COVID-19;
- They were asking the Southern Rural Committee for a grant of £2225 pounds to purchase and install a defibrillator in the centre of Little Wymondley
- The money would be spent on the purchase and installation of a tier one defibrillator that suits the community or the untrained user situation, to be installed on the outside wall of the Baptist Church on Stevens Road, which runs through the centre of the village;
- The community would benefit from having a defibrillator accessible to assist anybody in cardiac arrest;
- There was a defibrillator in the Parish but it was some way from the centre of the village in the locked sports pavilion and primarily intended for use during accidents at sporting events.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Faye Frost
- Councillor Lisa Nash

In response to questions Parish Councillor Dr Rebecca Riches-Duit advised:

- They did not believe the County Councillor for their area had the funding available to support this project;
- The defibrillator in the sports pavilion was not sufficient for the needs of the community at large;
- They would be able to look at funding the installation of the defibrillator themselves but funding from the Committee would be required to acquire it;

The Chair thanked Parish Councillor Dr Rebecca Riches-Duit for her presentation.

68 GRANT APPLICATIONS AND COMMUNITY UPDATE

Audio Recording – 37:22

The Community Engagement Team Leader presented the report entitled Grant and Community Update along with Appendices A and B and drew attention to the following:

- The application by Kimpton Parish Council had been withdrawn;
- Recalculated accordingly the budget sheet showed £7365 remaining, and the two grants as requested totalled £7674 which would leave a shortfall of £309;
- Members were not able to award both grants as requested due to the budget shortfall.

It was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee endorse the actions of the Community Engagement Team to promote greater community capacity and wellbeing in the Southern Rural area.

a) GRANT APPLICATION: OFFLEY ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION

Audio Recording – 39:00

The following Members asked questions and took part in debate:

- Councillor Ian Moody
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Faye Frost
- Councillor George Davies

Points raised included:

- Section 106 money could be investigated as a source of funding;
- This application was for 60% of the Committee's total budget and there were more meetings in the civic year to consider;
- The installation of water needed to be in place before the summer but until then was not urgent;
- The Committee valued the allotment project and saw its worth for the local community;
- The allotment association had fundraising ventures planned;
- The County Councillor for the area should be approached for funding from their locality budget;
- There was presently a 3 year lease on the land and spending public money on land not certain to be in public use in the near future was a concern;
- The allotment association was encouraged to return to the Committee in December once their fundraising situation was further explored.

Councillor Claire Strong proposed that the application be deferred to the next meeting. Councillor Lisa Nash seconded.

On the vote it was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee **DEFER** consideration of this application to until the next meeting.

REASON FOR DEFERRAL: To allow officers and the applicant to further explore financial options beside grant funding to support the project.

b) GRANT APPLICATION: WYMONDLEY PARISH COUNCIL

Audio Recording - 47:01

The following Members asked questions and took part in debate

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Faye Frost

Points raised included:

- The Parish Council had indicated that they would be able to find funds for installation themselves;
- The Committee preferred that community groups thoroughly explore alternative fundraising options or part funding rather than requesting that the Committee fully fund a project in the first instance.

Councillor Faye Frost proposed, Councillor Claire Strong seconded and it was:

RESOLVED: That grant funding of **£1925** be awarded to Wymondley Parish Council towards the purchase and installation of a Tier 1 defibrillator.

69

FLY-TIPPING AND ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME IN THE SOUTHERN RURAL AREA

Audio Recording – 50:00

The Community Protection Manager and Community Safety Team Leader gave a presentation on fly tipping and environmental crime in the Southern Rural area, raising points including:

- Fly tipping had continued to increase, particularly over the last 18 months to 2 years during the pandemic, and Council officers and partners have been working really hard to tackle the issue.
- From a low point in 2012/13, where 561 offences were recorded, fly tipping has massively increased to last year where 1871 offences were recorded. The increase on last year was 72%.
- A lot of can be attributed to the early stages of lockdown.
- Even though restrictions were being eased and waste sites are reopened, offences are still at a similar rate as to last year;
- 40% of flight tips that were cleared were in the Hitchwood, Offa and Hoo areas which accounted for 967 offences out of just under 2,500.
- Out of the 80 offences so far this year in that area, 12 have had evidence to link to a person or an address; 8 of those 12 relate back to Luton.
- While there had been an increase in offences and reports there had been no increase in staff to address them and the team was stretched;
- In the last year 27 fixed penalties were issued, 6 individuals were prosecuted the team issued 10 Community Resolutions under the Anti Social Behaviour Act.
- This year a further 12 fixed penalties had been issued, with one court prosecution and increased community resolutions up to 19;
- The top five areas for fly-tipping throughout North Herts in the last three years were Hitchwood, Offa and Who at 967, Chesfield on 170, Arbury on 130, Weston and Standon at 109, and Knebworth at 100.
- The team was working on data analysis to map offences;
- The Southern Rural area was vast and had no natural centre which made prevention difficult;
- Work was ongoing with Luton Borough Council, the Shared Anti-Fraud Service, and the National Anti-Fraud Network to prevent fly tips and track offenders;
- The team was also working with community groups and parish councils to encourage the public to engage responsible waste contractors and to report fly tips;
- Court proceedings against fly-tippers were not always effective measures due to long lead in times and low fines;
- Lobbying work was underway to influence government policy in this area to make court orders a more effective deterrent;
- Fly tips were now being advertised on the North Herts website and social media channels broadcasting the fines associated with them.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Faye Frost
- Councillor Mandi Tandi
- Councillor Ian Moody

In response to questions the Community Safety Team Leader advised:

- Fines are set by government for fixed penalty notices. The maximum that the Council can issue currently is £400 on a fixed penalty, and the minimum they can be reduced to is £120; NHCs rate was £300
- Most fixed penalty notices were paid and payment terms were available for those who could not afford to pay in one instalment;
- People issued with fixed penalty notices could not be named and shamed if and when the fine was discharged as it was not considered a criminal offence, and liability ends with the payment of the fine.
- Setting up permanent CCTV cameras in rural areas was difficult in that identifying hotspots was hard and there were not readily available power supplies;
- 'Wildlife,' style cameras were sometimes used but these were often detected by offenders;

In response to questions the Community Protection Manager advised:

- When the Committee last received an update on fly tipping numbers were down; incidences had since increased;
- The Herts Waste Partnership was leading on lobbying efforts to influence the government and Sentencing Council on improving the impact of court proceedings against fly-tipping; Members could support these efforts by amplifying this message and liaising with other authorities including local MPs;
- Work was being done to educate the public on licensing and the necessity of checking whether waste carriers were disposing of waste legally to prevent fly tips before they occur;
- There was certainly a correlation between the closure of waste disposal services at the start of the pandemic lockdown and an increase in fly tips.

The Chair thanked the Community Protection Manager and Community Safety Team Leader for their presentation.

70 INFORMATION NOTE: HITCHIN RURAL SAFER NEIGHBOURHOOD REPORT

Audio Recording: 1:32:46

The Committee received the information note of the Hertfordshire Constabulary entitled Hitchin Rural Safer Neighbourhood Report.

Councillor Faye Frost noted that she had been in contact with Sergeant Guy Westwood due to concerns about an officer's conduct in the area. She reiterated that she felt 99.9% of the time the police in the area were helpful, thorough, and diligent. Eight or nine members of the same village had come forward to say they had a problem with a police officer, and she had been to Sergeant Westwood and Sergeant Nelms who were instantly responsive. They brought this officer in, listened to everyone's concerns, and put forward extra training for this officer to resolve the issue.

71 SECTION 106 ANNUAL UPDATE 2020/21

Audio Recording: 1:34:47

The Development and Planning Manager presented the report entitled Section 106 Annual Update 2020/2021 along with Appendices 1-5. He drew attention to the following:

- The Planning team have been producing an infrastructure funding statement, in line with government requirements to produce an annual statement of everything that happens in relation to infrastructure funding in Section 106 to be published in December 2021

- in March 2021 Cabinet decided not to invest in producing a Community Infrastructure Levy in line with officers advice that we needed to use the spare funds we had in Planning to fund what was described as the master planning project for the major strategic sites that will be delivered upon the adoption of the local plan;
- There were very few new agreements in the Southern Rural area that were being reached in development, as they only apply to schemes of more than 10 dwellings;
- One agreement with Odyssey Health Club had delivered significant funds for the NHS and public spaces;
- Members would see fewer small 106 Agreements made in future, with those that were reached being larger and more targeted;
- In future the report would present a more in the round view of the Section 106 agreements and Unilateral Undertakings.

On the vote it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Committee note the content of the report.
- (2) That the Committee agree that a report shall continue to be presented on an annual basis to the Area Committee, which sets out full records of all Section 106 activity for the preceding financial year and which reflects changes in legislation and practice.
- (3) That, other than where a contribution has been negotiated for a specific purpose or project, Ward Members of the area where the Section 106 Obligation or Unilateral Undertaking funding is generated and the Area Committee be consulted prior to funding being allocated away from that area. Members must note that the discretionary funds are rapidly diminishing and will not be replaced under current legislation and practice, for reasons that are set out in this report.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

- (1) To ensure that there is a robust system for negotiating and managing Section 106 Obligations and Unilateral Undertakings, that records activity for each financial year and is placed in the public domain.
- (2) To ensure that the process is kept under constant review and Member scrutiny and that the risk associated with this activity is managed in an appropriate manner.

72 WARD MATTERS AND OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS - MEMBERS' REPORTS

Audio recording – 1:40:30

Councillor Lisa Nash provided an update to the Committee on Knebworth Festival and the Knebworth Town Twinning Association.

Knebworth Festival

Knebworth Festival Committee was reinvigorated with new team members, and they're working towards the Christmas lights, which were on the 19th of November. The main festival week was planned in June.

Knebworth Town Twinning Association

The Twinning Association had held a Bastille Day fundraising event. There would also be a fundraising quiz at the weekend on Saturday.

Councillor Claire Strong provided an update to the Committee on an event with the 'Within the Walls,' project from Down the Woods CIC and commended the organisation on the gardens

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which were worth visiting, and spoke of having met with residents and members who intended to participate in the courses offered by the group.

The meeting closed at 8.13 pm

Chair