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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

SOUTHERN RURAL COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERNON ROAD, LETCHWORTH
ON THURSDAY, 30TH JUNE, 2022 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Councillor George Davies (Chair), Councillor Mandi Tandi (Vice-Chair), David Barnard, Faye Frost, Ralph Muncer, Sam North and Claire Strong*

In Attendance:

James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Claire Morgan (Community Engagement Team Leader), Aimee Flack (Community Engagement Officer) and Abigail Hamilton (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer)

Also Present:

At the commencement of the meeting approximately 5 members of the public, including registered speakers.

88 WELCOME

The Chair welcomed Members, Officers and members of the public to the Southern Rural Committee meeting.

The Chair advised Members of an error to the published agenda, which had incorrectly included Hitchin Area Committee minutes from the meeting on 26 May 2022. The correct Southern Rural Area Committee minutes had been published as a supplementary document.

89 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2:00

Apologies for absence were received by Councillors Ian Moody and Lisa Nash.

Councillor Terry Tyler was absent.

90 MINUTES - 3 MARCH 2022, 26 MAY 2022

Audio Recording – 2:16

Councillor George Davies, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Claire Strong seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 3 March 2022 and 26 May 2022 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

91 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 4:03

There was no other business notified.

92 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 4:07

- (1) The Chair welcomed those present at the meeting, especially Members attending their first Southern Rural Committee and the members of public who had attended to give a presentation and Councillor Ralph Muncer who had attended his first Area Committee meeting following his election in May;
- (2) 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 need to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.

93 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 4:30

The Chair invited Aimee Flack, Assistant Community Engagement Officer, to update Members on budgets.

- The current base budget from April 2022 - March 2023 is £8,700
- £222 was brought forward from last year, this leaves a budget of £8,922
- The grant applications from this meeting totalled £1,780 and after deducting this, left a budget balance of £7142
- The Codicote tennis club application, which was deferred at the last meeting, had withdrawn their application as they had been awarded funding elsewhere

Ann Warner and Councillor Yvonne Hart from Holwell Parish Council, thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee regarding funding for the Pavilion as follows:

- The Parish Council gets £9000 a year
- The old pavilion was dilapidated and was a danger and because of this they couldn't retain any of the old pavilion and had to complete demolish it and rebuild
- Holwell Parish Council managed to get grants to build the new pavilion and the Parish Council contributed to the build
- Parish Council didn't have enough money to furnish the pavilion
- They wanted the new pavilion to be used by residents for things such as parties and community events
- The pavilion is used for sports such as cricket in the summer and football in the winter and has changing rooms for this

The Chair thanked Ms Warner and Ms Hart for their presentation.

The following members asked questions:

- Councillor Muncer
- Councillor Barnard
- Councillor Strong

In response to questions, Ms Warner and Ms Hart advised:

- The build should be completed in July or August
- Parish Council applied for many other grants before the new build but didn't get them

- Parish Council received a grant from the football foundation which is why there are changing rooms, as well as Settle Homes, and the Rands Foundation Trust
- The pavilion is rented out during events however the charge would be minimal as they want it to be accessible and used by all the residents. The only amount they would charge would be to cover the cost of cleaning after the event and to help with the maintenance of the grounds.

Councillor Barnard also advised that if any small items are needed in the future then he would consider using the Hertfordshire County Council locality budget.

94 GRANT APPLICATION - HOLWELL PARISH COUNCIL

Councillor Sam North proposed, Councillor David Barnard seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee allocate £1,211 to Holwell Parish Council towards chairs, tables, cooker, and fridge/freezer as outlined in paragraph 8.1.1 of the officer's report.

95 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 18:08

Clare Gooden from the River Hiz Conservation Group thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee regarding conservation of the River Hiz as follows:

- Chalk streams are rare rivers, there are only 200 in the world. 85% of these are found in the south of England and North Hertfordshire has three of these.
- These streams have a fragile environment with specialised plants and support special wildlife habitats and species and are important for natural events such as fish like brown trout laying eggs
- The rivers are at risk from overextraction of ground water, invasive non-native species, disturbance or destruction of bank sides and flood plain habitats, and pollution
- A shared initiative was launched in 2019 by Ickleford Parish Council and the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust to involve local residents who are interested in protecting the chalk streams in Ickleford and the surrounding areas
- 96 people attended the first meeting and the living rivers officer from the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust created a 5-year plan which the Ickleford Parish Council adopted in 2020
- The River Hiz Conservation Group (RHCG) received a start-up grant from North Hertfordshire District Council in 2021
- RHCG relies on around 20 volunteers to carry out the physically demanding work in the river within a seasonal calendar, as well as guidance from the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust
- RHCG have worked on other projects such as website design, education groups, newsletters and information boards
- RHCG needed funding for essential expenses such as a 3-year environment agency permits, public liability insurance, protective safety clothing, suitable tools, and professional training and supervision for volunteers
- These resources cost £1,550 in total, and they have received £986 in donations and so are asking for the remaining balance to keep the volunteers well equipped and safe

The Chair thanked Ms Gooden for her presentation.

Councillor David Barnard also offered an additional 50% of the grant amount from Hertfordshire County Council locality budget.

96 GRANT APPLICATION - RIVER HIZ CONSERVATION GROUP

Councillor Claire Strong proposed, Councillor David Barnard seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee allocate £569 to River Hiz Conservation Group towards conservation work of Ickleford's Chalk Stream as outlined in paragraph 8.1.2 of the officer's report.

97 GRANTS & COMMUNITY UPDATE

Audio recording – 32:22

NB: Parts of this item was considered prior to Item 5 (Minute 4:30 refers)

Aimee Flack, Assistant Community Engagement Officer, presented the report entitled Grants & Community Update and gave a verbal presentation, which included:

- The Community Engagement team have explored the idea of creating a Parish forum – a chance for Parishes in the Southern Rural area to meet online to connect and share information, events and projects and explore any common issues that could be worked on collaboratively or raised in Full Council
- There was a potential that the Parish forum to be done quarterly with the first one being in autumn. Gather responses about whether it needs to be done more or less frequently and using the first meeting to discuss themes which Parishes want to talk about
- The Council has processed grants to utilise the Health Protection Board funding to assist the community's recovery following the pandemic
- The Community Engagement team currently have one application and a couple pending, and are arranging a date for a panel meeting
- Aimee highlighted the network groups that coordinate with themes such as food provision, youth action and the reintroduction of green and growing network group which is an opportunity for those who use green spaces to support local communities with sustainability and healthy lifestyles
- Aimee brought attention to the North Herts Engage Facebook page where community groups can share events and information can be highlighted
- There was an update from Down the Woods who had 8 participants and really benefitted from the activities the group put on
- Since the report was published there was also an update from Pirton Joycare who hosted a Jubilee afternoon tea with 74 residents aged 60+ who celebrated and met new friends, and received really positive feedback

Councillor Claire Strong also gave an update on Pirton Players and their new lighting system which received positive feedback.

Councillor David Barnard gave an update on the Ickleford Larder which started at the beginning of the pandemic. Food that would normally be taken to landfill has been distributed to the community for free and has provided food for those who really need it. This has not only provided for Ickleford but also the surrounding areas in North Hertfordshire.

Councillor George Davies proposed, Councillor Faye Frost seconded and, following a vote, it was:

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

REASON FOR DECISION:

- (1) To ensure the Members are kept informed of the work of the Community Engagement Team
- (2) This report intended to inform Members of the financial resources available. It draws attention to the current budgetary situation by assisting in the effective financial management of the budgets. 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.
- (3) The awarding of financial assistance to voluntary organisations and the use of discretionary spending allows the Committee to further the aims of the Council Plan.

98 WARD MATTERS AND OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS - MEMBERS' REPORTS

Audio recording – 41:28

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

Closure of Kimpton Surgery –

Councillor Ralph Muncer advised that there was a public consultation and a public meeting opposing the NHS closure of the Kimpton Surgery and that many residents attended. He stated that the closure of this surgery would force residents to travel elsewhere and would have a large impact on elderly and vulnerable people, as well as those who rely on public transport. He reassured Kimpton residents and in response to a question from Councillor Sam North said that the local MP and County Councillor are heavily involved in this.

Councillor David Barnard proposed wording for a motion for consideration to Council as follows: "That this Council regrets the proposal of the NHS to close the surgery in Kimpton and urges the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to take urgent action to withdraw this proposal, and ensure that residents of Kimpton and surrounding rural communities can readily access important medical care". He was advised that specific wording would have to be reviewed.

Councillor Sam North advised that the Council appoints members to sit on organisations such as the Hertfordshire Health Scrutiny Committee and that residents might benefit from consideration of the topic by full Council.

Councillor David Barnard proposed, Councillor Ralph Muncer seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RECOMMENDED TO FULL COUNCIL: That the Council discusses the closure of Kimpton GP surgery and the issue of accessibility of healthcare services for residents in rural wards.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION: To act as forum for discussion on matters of local interest and to make arrangements for the provision of information about local services and other matters to people in the area.

Proposals to build solar parks in North Hertfordshire –

Councillor David Barnard advised that he has seen a proposal to build a solar park in the east of Luton and will come out as far as the villages in Beechwood Green. There will be a formal

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application by the summer. He asked everyone to be mindful and to support the villages around the region as it will have a visual impact on the green belt.

Councillor George Davies also noted that he was aware of the proposals in his own ward and advised Councillors that they will see further proposals soon.

Rand's Educational Foundation –

Councillor Claire Strong advised that the charity is changing and that a council nomination from North Hertfordshire District Council is no longer needed.

Councillors Portal –

The Chair advised that a new Councillors Portal was available for Members to report ward issues and that further training would be made available for Members on this.

The meeting closed at 8.26 pm

Chair