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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERONON ROAD, LETCHWORTH, HERTS SG6 3JF
ON TUESDAY, 24TH JUNE, 2025 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Daniel Allen (Chair), Val Bryant (Vice-Chair), Ian Albert, Amy Allen, Mick Debenham, Tamsin Thomas and Donna Wright.*

In Attendance: *Amy Cantrill (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Georgina Chapman (Policy & Strategy Team Leader), Deborah Coates (Principal Strategic Planning Officer), Ian Couper (Director - Resources), Steve Crowley (Director - Enterprise), Philip Doggett (Principal Estates Surveyor), Susan Le Dain (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Anthony Roche (Chief Executive), Nigel Smith (Director - Place) and Jeanette Thompson (Director - Governance).*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting there were no members of the public present.*

Councillor Sean Nolan was also in attendance as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 46 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Laura Williams.

2 MINUTES - 20 MAY 2025

Audio Recording – 1 minute 52 seconds

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Mick Debenham seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 20 May 2025 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

3 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 34 seconds

There was no other business notified.

4 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 39 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 for the purposes of clarification that 4.8.23(a) of the Constitution did not apply to this meeting.

5 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 3 minutes 53 seconds

There was no public participation at the meeting.

6 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Audio recording – 3 minutes 57 seconds

The Chair advised that the items referred from the Finance Audit and Risk Committee would be taken with the respective items on the agenda.

7 STRATEGIC PLANNING MATTERS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 30 seconds

Councillor Donna Wright, as Executive Member for Place, presented the report entitled 'Strategic Planning Matters' and advised that:

- This report summarised the latest position on key planning and transport issues.
- The Baldock Masterplan had been approved by Council on 16 June 2025.
- A summary of the current status of the six strategic masterplans was included on pages 13 and 14 of the report.
- The review of North Herts Local Plan was ongoing and the timetable was outlined on page 14 of the report.
- A summary of other Local Plans from neighbouring authorities was highlighted in pages 15 and 16 of the report.
- The Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan was approved by a Delegated Decision.
- The National Planning Policy Framework had been updated by the amendment of paragraph 155 which sets out the criteria for development in the Green Belt.
- The expansion of Luton Airport approved in April 2025 would increase passenger numbers from 19 million to 32 million.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Mick Debenham
- Councillor Ian Albert

In response to questions, the Director – Place advised:

- No date had yet been set for when building would commence for the first Masterplan.
- Following the Project Board in July, the North Herts Council Draft Town Centre Strategy would be submitted to Cabinet in September.

In response to a question from Councillor Ian Albert, Councillor Daniel Allen advised he would speak with Officers to see whether an interim Town Centre Strategy report could be submitted to Members before September.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Tamsin Thomas
- Councillor Val Bryant

Points raised during the debate included:

- It was necessary to ensure that the Town Centre Strategy was relevant for each town in the district.
- Teams would need to work effectively together across departmental lines both internally and externally.
- The importance of keeping residents informed with information being publicised on the website.
- The disappointment of the abandonment of the Chilterns National Landscape proposed extension due to financial reasons.

Councillor Donna Wright proposed and Councillor Tamsin Thomas seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the report on strategic planning matters was noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To keep Cabinet informed of recent developments on strategic planning matters.

8 CODICOTE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Audio recording – 19 minutes 58 seconds

Councillor Donna Wright, as Executive Member for Place, presented the report entitled 'Codicote Neighbourhood Plan' and advised that:

- The Codicote Neighbourhood Plan was designated by Council in June 2014.
- Codicote Parish Council submitted their Neighbourhood Plan to the Council in October 2024.
- Following public consultation an independent examiner was appointed by the Council.
- Details of the basic conditions of the Neighbourhood Plan were highlighted in Appendix A.
- A schedule of the modifications proposed by the examiner were set out Appendix B.
- The examiner recommended this should proceed to a referendum to be held on 14 August 2025.
- The Codicote Neighbourhood Plan was a Key Decision as it included the two district wards of Codicote & Kimpton and Knebworth.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Mick Debenham

Points raised during the debate included:

- It was good to see how well parish councils and residents had worked with Officers to reach this strong proposal.
- A referendum was the right way forward and it would provide residents an opportunity to give their opinions.

Councillor Donna Wright proposed and Councillor Mick Debenham seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Noted the Examiner's report for the Codicote Neighbourhood Plan.
- (2) Approved the Codicote Neighbourhood Plan following the inclusion of the Examiner's proposed modifications to the Codicote Neighbourhood Plan, as set out in Appendix A, and it was approved to proceed to a referendum.
- (3) Instructed the Counting Officer to conduct a referendum on the Codicote Neighbourhood Plan.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To progress the Codicote Neighbourhood Plan, enable a referendum to take place and if more than 50% of those voting in favour of the Codicote Neighbourhood Plan to "make" the Codicote Neighbourhood Plan.

9 SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY 2025-2030

Audio recording – 24 minutes 27 seconds

Councillor Amy Allen, as Executive Member for Environment, presented the report entitled 'Sustainability Strategy 2025-2030' and advised that:

- This report proposed replacement of the current Climate Change Strategy 2022-2027 with the Sustainability Strategy 2025-2030.
- Changing to a broader sustainability strategy would be in align with the priority of sustainability in the Council Plan.
- This strategy sets out the aims and actions of the themes of Council emissions.
- Colour coding of actions referred to the themes as well as a section for cross cutting actions.
- The aims and actions were consulted on by a survey where 141 responses were received from the public, 33 from staff and 3 from Councillors.
- A summary of the consultation responses was set out in Appendix C.
- Progress on actions would be monitored by the Climate and Sustainability Officer Group (CSOG) and regular reporting to the Political Liaison Board (PLB).
- A small amendment was proposed to page 70 of Appendix A to make reference to the Hertfordshire Growth Board and a sustainable county emission.
- A small amendment was proposed to action 10 on page 73 of Appendix B to make reference to embedding the sustainability goal in the Procurement Strategy.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Donna Wright
- Councillor Val Bryant

In response to questions, the Policy and Strategy Team Leader advised:

- Turnout had been good at the Officer consultation workshop with several members of the Leadership Team in attendance and from a range of teams across the Council and all directorates were covered.
- A Council Emissions report would be uploaded to the Climate Change webpage shortly.
- By the time the Sustainability Strategy went to the PLB any comments received following the workshop had been satisfactorily covered.
- The Sustainability Strategy would be made available on the Climate Change webpage and it was being considered to rename some of the webpages as this was now a Sustainability Strategy to make things clearer.

Councillor Amy Allen proposed and Councillor Mick Debenham seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Noted the contents of Appendix C Sustainability Strategy Consultation Response.
- (2) Adopted the following documents, taking into consideration the new actions proposed under each theme.
 - Appendix A Sustainability Strategy 2025-2030
 - Appendix B Sustainability Strategy Actions Table

REASON FOR DECISIONS: In 2019 the Council passed a motion to declare a Climate Emergency, pledging to do everything within its power to become carbon neutral by 2030. In July 2023, the Council also declared an Ecological Emergency recognising that the crisis facing nature requires urgent action and is interlinked with the climate crisis. The replacement of the Climate Change Strategy 2022-2027 and transition to the Sustainability Strategy will reflect the Sustainability priority in the Council Plan 2024-28. As such it includes new actions under this broader scope. It also reflects the latest legislation and best practice.

10 COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2024-25 (END OF YEAR)

Audio recording – 32 minutes 47 seconds

Councillor Ian Albert, as the Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled 'Council Delivery Plan 2024-25 (End of Year)' and advised that:

- The Council Delivery Plan was a supportive document for the Council Plan and demonstrated the progress Council had made on the key projects.
- The report also detailed the four overarching risks of resourcing, cyber security, financial sustainability and local government reorganisation.
- Performance indicators were aimed at assessing corporate performance and the performance of the key service areas.
- Feedback from the Local Government Association peer review and a recent audit report highlighted that the Council needed to ensure the key performance indicators were aligned to the Council Delivery Plan and other key strategies.

- The early key performance indicators that were being recommended to Cabinet were set out in paragraph 8.7 of the report.
- Resourcing was a key factor in both red performance indicators which related to answering calls within 45 seconds and Careline installations within 10 days. The actions being taken to address this were set out in paragraph 8.4 of the report.

In response to a question from Councillor Donna Wright, the Director – Resources advised that there was currently no more information than supplied in the report concerning the progress of the project to replace the collapsed weir at Oughtonhead Common.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Tamsin Thomas
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Mick Debenham

Points raised during the debate included:

- It was good to see so many projects included in the Council Delivery Plan.
- This was a very accurate plan which demonstrated the efficiency of the Council.
- The achievement of Everyone Active for reaching 200K above their target number of visitors to the leisure centres.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Tamsin Thomas seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Noted the progress against Council projects as set out in the Council Delivery Plan, and approved the changes to the milestones (Appendix A).
- (2) Noted the performance against the performance indicators and confirmed the actions detailed in paragraph 8.4.
- (3) Approved the KPI targets for 2025/26 as detailed in Appendix B.
- (4) Approved the projects that will be included on the Council Delivery Plan for 2025/26.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: The Council Delivery Plan (CDP) monitoring reports provide Cabinet with an opportunity to monitor progress against the key Council projects, and understand any new issues, risks, or opportunities. Overview and Scrutiny are welcome to consider these reports but have been trialling having a more specific focus at each meeting. The Council Delivery Plan will be publicised to all Members via the Members Information Service.

11 REVENUE BUDGET OUTTURN 2024/25

Audio recording – 41 minutes 38 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Sean Nolan, as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Nolan advised that there had been discussions around:

- It was positive that the Council reserves had increased.
- However, that underspend was due to issues around resourcing and delivery of some work.

- That there had been some slippage, or less income than expected in the areas of Enterprise and Regulatory.
- This report highlighted that although the Council was managing finances well, there would still be challenges ahead to ensure the delivery of services.

Councillor Ian Albert, as the Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled 'Revenue Budget Outturn 2024/25' and advised that:

- The budget variances identified in the last quarter were highlighted in Table 4.
- There was £817K underspend of which £563K related to delayed activities for 2025/26.
- The significant variances over the whole year were highlighted in Appendix A.
- The position on funding was set out in paragraph 8.9.
- There had been fewer Business Rate Pool appeals than expected which had enabled a reduction in the provision set aside for these, resulting in an increased surplus. This would be in the General Fund balance for 2026/27.
- The balance from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) grants reserve was higher than forecast.
- This outturn report was being referred to Full Council to approve the transfer of reserves.

The Monitoring Officer advised for clarity that the figures in the Cabinet recommendations were correct and had been updated since the referral from the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.

In response to a question from Councillor Daniel Allen, the Service Director – Resources advised that there were some historic rental positions which needed to be resolved and new lettings might be affected by redevelopment plans, There had not been additional income reflected in the budget.

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

RESOLVED: That Cabinet

- (1) Noted this report.
- (2) Approved a decrease of £817k in the 2024/25 net General Fund expenditure, as identified in section 8, to a total of £17.932million.
- (3) Approved the changes to the 2025/26 General Fund budget, as identified in table 4 and paragraph 8.3, a total £202k increase in net expenditure.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That Council approves the net transfer to earmarked reserves, as identified in table 9, of £1.006million.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

- (1) Members are able to monitor, make adjustments within the overall budgetary framework and request appropriate action of Services who do not meet the budget targets set as part of the Corporate Business Planning process.
- (2) Changes to the Council's balances are monitored and approved.

12 **INVESTMENT STRATEGY (CAPITAL AND TREASURY) END OF YEAR REVIEW 2024/25**

Audio recording – 50 minutes and 9 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Sean Nolan, as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Nolan advised that there had been discussions around:

- The number of adjustments made in the Capital Programme which had been driven by spend.
- The fact that reductions in interest rates had not caused a negative impact on investments and income had remained above expected levels.
- Noticing how the Council was moving closer to a position where it would need to borrow to fund the Capital Programme and the decisions that would need to be made.
- How any future external borrowing would produce increased costs and that this should be considered now to ensure there was a clear view of this going forward.

Councillor Ian Albert, as the Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled 'Investment Strategy (Capital and Treasury) End of Year Review 2024/25' and advised that:

- Nearly £3 million of interest from investments had been generated during the year as detailed in the Executive Summary of the report, but high inflation would have affected costs.
- The Council was in a good strong financial position going forward.
- A detailed review of the Capital Programme had been carried out by Executive Members earlier in the year and this would be carried out again later in the year as the Council moved towards the budget setting process.
- Capital schemes which had not been completed in 2024/25 and would move to 2025/26 were detailed in Table 2.
- Details of significant variances for the completed schemes were highlighted in Table 3.
- Details of completed schemes were set out in paragraph 8.6 of the report.
- The Council would begin to look to borrowing internally in this financial year.
- The treasury and prudential indicators in Appendix B were being referred to Full Council for approval.
- A minor breach of investment limits for one day due had occurred due to absence of a member of staff as set out in paragraph 8.10 of the report. The Council was looking into ways to ensure this situation would not happen again.

The Chair reminded Members that the figures in the Cabinet recommendations were correct and had been updated since the referral from the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.

In response to a question from Councillor Val Bryant, the Director – Resources advised that Jackmans Community Centre was one of the two community centres requiring flat roof safety works, as detailed on page 153 of the report. The Director - Resources advised Members that he would inform them of the name of the second community centre following the meeting.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed as amended and Councillor Amy Allen seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Noted expenditure of £11.348million in 2024/25 on the capital programme, paragraph 8.3 refers.
- (2) Approved the adjustments to the capital programme for 2025/26 as a result of the revised timetable of schemes detailed in table 2, increasing the estimated spend by £5.204million.

- (3) Noted the position of the availability of capital resources, as detailed in table 4 paragraph 8.7 and the requirement to keep the capital programme under review for affordability.
- (4) Approved the application of £3.712million of capital receipts/set aside towards the 2024/25 capital programme, paragraph 8.7 refers.
- (5) Noted the position of Treasury Management activity as at the end of March 2025.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That it:

- (1) Approves the actual 2024/25 prudential and treasury indicators as detailed in Appendix B.
- (2) Notes the annual Treasury Management Review for 2024/25 (Appendix B).

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

- (1) Cabinet is required to approve adjustments to the capital programme and ensure the capital programme is fully funded.
- (2) To ensure the Council's continued compliance with CIPFA's code of practice on Treasury Management and the Local Government Act 2003 and that the Council manages its exposure to interest and capital risk.

13 RISK MANAGEMENT GOVERNANCE - YEAR END REVIEW

Audio recording – 59 minutes and 43 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Sean Nolan, as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Nolan advised that there had been discussions around:

- The usefulness of this report as it provided in depth detail of each of the risks included.
- The report focussed on mitigating actions and included the history of progress the Council had made on managing its risks.
- How the forthcoming 3-year spending settlement from the government would help to provide certainty on incoming funding.
- The importance of keeping close interest over the coming year around the impending local government reform and the Churchgate development.

In response to a question from Councillor Daniel Allen, Councillor Nolan advised that there had been limited discussion regarding actions for the Digital Budget Hub risk as detailed on page 189 of the report.

Councillor Ian Albert, as the Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled 'Risk Management Governance – Year End Review' and advised that:

- The report described activities in relation to risk management and was a combination of what had happened during 2024/25 and the position at the end of the year.
- This report demonstrated there was active risk management and regular risk reviews and the mitigating actions for identified risks as well as identifying new risks.
- In the six-month period between October 2024 to March 2025 a review of all risks had been undertaken.
- The work undertaken by the Risk and Performance Management Group was detailed in paragraph 5.1.
- Details of the performance against risk actions for 2024/25 was highlighted in paragraph 12.2.

- This end of year report was being referred to Full Council for an oversight of risk management activities.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed as amended and Councillor Amy Allen seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet noted the report.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: To note the report.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

- (1) Cabinet has responsibility for ensuring the management of risks.
- (2) This Committee has responsibility to monitor the effective development and operation of risk management.

14 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Audio recording – 1 hour 6 minutes 39 seconds

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Mick Debenham seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 and 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended).

15 PART 2 MINUTES - 14 JANUARY 2025 AND 18 MARCH 2025

N.B. This item was considered in restricted session and therefore no recordings were available.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Mick Debenham seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Part 2 Minutes of the Meetings of the Committee held on 14 January 2025 and 18 March 2025 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

16 THE ARENA, BALDOCK - PART 1

Audio recording – 1 hour 35 minutes 8 seconds

Councillor Tamsin Thomas, as Executive Member for Enterprise, presented the report entitled 'The Arena, Baldock – Part 1' and advised that:

- The Arena football ground was owned by the Council and had been let to Hitchin Town Community Football Club Limited (HTCFC) under a 50-year lease agreement which expired in 2045.
- These recommendations would enable HTCFC to make investments in the pitch and wider facilities.
- This report would resolve a long-standing issue for The Arena.
- HTCFC operated multi facilities from the ground.
- There was a lot of history concerning the site which was established in the 1980s.

- Council Officers had been in dialogue with HTCFC and had reached this agreement to resolve the issues.
- The uncertainty of treatment of the rent balance had prevented HTCFC from progressing with financial plans, including the ability to apply for grants to improve the facilities which prevented securing more senior football teams using the ground.
- This solution would enable HTCFC to continue in discussions with Baldock Town Football Club to reach agreement for their return to play at The Arena.

In response to a question from Councillor Ian Albert, the Principal Estates Surveyor advised that following agreement of the recommendations the legal documents could be prepared quickly and signed within weeks.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Mick Debenham
- Councillor Daniel Allen

Points raised during the debate included:

- These recommendations were a significant step forward for the Arena and should be supported.
- It should not be forgotten that Hitchin Town Community Football Club Limited had kept the Arena going for 20 years. The Arena was a benefit for all the residents of North Hertfordshire.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas proposed and Councillor Mick Debenham seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Agreed to cancel (write-off or credit note) the outstanding balance on the rent account for the reasons outlined in the report.
- (2) Amended the user clause and alienation provisions in the lease to allow for existing sublettings and licence arrangements to be regularised and provision for possible future sublettings.
- (3) Agreed to accept a revised rent as outlined in the Part 2 report. Future 5 yearly rent reviews to be in line with the increase in CPI.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: A previous agreement with the club in respect of repayment of arrears and level of new rent was never finalised and the Council continued to issue rent demands based on an historic rent review. The tenant paid rent on the basis of the new rent that they understood had been agreed. The uncertainty of treatment of the rent balance prevents the club from progressing with their financial plans to replace the pitch and invest in the site. The Council also needs to regularise the new rent, outstanding balance and authorise underlettings. It is in both parties interest to have clarity on the lease going forward, and for the future success of the club, its members and users of the facilities.

17 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Audio recording – 1 hour 55 minutes 10 seconds

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Val Bryant seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended).

N.B. There was a break in proceedings following this item and the meeting reconvened at 21:15

18 RADBURN WAY, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY - PART 2

N.B. This item was considered in restricted session and therefore no recordings were available.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas, as Executive Member for Enterprise, presented the report entitled 'Radburn Way, Letchworth Garden City – Part 2'.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas proposed and Councillor Mick Debenham seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Approved that the land should no longer be declared surplus, and development of the site should not be pursued.
- (2) Approved progressing with plans to improve management of the land with the intention to provide a habitat bank, or similar, with improved public access as appropriate. Officers from Green Space, Estates and other services to work jointly to manage and deliver the project, reporting back to the Executive Members for Enterprise, Resources and Environment.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) Difficulty providing a suitable access to the site, with a significant associated capital cost to achieve.
- (2) Hertfordshire County Council has advised local planning authorities that the Herts Ecological Networks Map should be used to assess the strategic importance of habitats, and this site has been noted as being strategically significant - the highest rating.
- (3) The need, as part of the planning allocation, for the re-provision of the priority orchard habitat elsewhere in North Herts, in addition to the new Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirements. BNG makes sure that habitats for wildlife are left in a measurably better state than they were before the development and is now mandatory.
- (4) A biodiversity baseline assessment of the site in July 2024 identified a high baseline biodiversity value due to the presence of the strategically significant Priority Habitat Traditional Orchard, with mixed scrub and mature and irreplaceable trees.
- (5) Since the allocation of the site in the Local Plan the Council has declared both an ecological and climate emergency.

- (6) Settle Group concluded that a small development on the eastern section of the site with access from the garage site on Radburn Way would not be viable.
- (7) A financial assessment attached at Appendix B of the Part 2 Report, indicates residential development of the site is not viable either with access from a third-party ownership on Radburn Way or via Freeman Drive, given the additional costs of developing the site in accordance with planning and climate change requirements.

19 RADBURN WAY, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY - PART 1

Audio recording – 2 hours 10 minutes 1 second

Councillor Tamsin Thomas, as Executive Member for Enterprise, presented the report entitled 'Radburn Way, Letchworth Garden City – Part 1' and advised that:

- The report was to consider not to progress with the development or disposal of the site at Radburn Way, Letchworth and instead to capitalise on the rich biodiversity of the site, with a view to using part of the site as a habitat bank and improving public use of the site.
- This report would resolve a longstanding question about the future of this green space and the orchard within it.
- The Council owned the area of land between the Baldock Road and Radburn Way in Letchworth Garden City as shown on the plan in the report.
- This area of 0.94 hectares was allocated for residential development in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan under policy LG6 along with the adjoining land owned by Hertfordshire County Council.
- The site contained a priority orchard including veteran trees which were a precious and protected resource.
- The Local Plan allocation required the re-provision of a change of habitat within the land to deliver 10% of biodiversity net gains on the site.
- Taking up this recommendation would enable the Council to restore this green space to the public and uphold the commitment of the Council to both climate and ecological diversity.
- This orchard had a priority status and it would be a significant challenge to reposition the orchard elsewhere.
- The intention would be to restore and enhance the site using volunteer groups with the help of local residents where possible.
- There would be an opportunity to sell biodiversity units to receive capital receipts on council sites elsewhere.
- For these gains to be realised it would be necessary for the site to be restored, enhanced and maintained for a period of no less than 30 years.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Amy Allen
- Councillor Mick Debenham
- Councillor Daniel Allen

Points raised during the debate included:

- There were no alternative sites available elsewhere.
- This land should not be allocated for housing and a habitat bank would help the biodiversity gain for the Council.
- This was a benefit for the whole district and for a fairer greener North Hertfordshire.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas proposed and Councillor Mick Debenham seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Approved that the land should no longer be declared surplus, and development of the site should not be pursued.
- (2) Approved progressing with plans to improve management of the land with the intention to provide a habitat bank, or similar, with improved public access as appropriate. Officers from Green Space, Estates and other services to work jointly to manage and deliver the project, reporting back to the Executive Members for Enterprise, Resources and Environment.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) Difficulty providing a suitable access to the site, with a significant associated capital cost to achieve.
- (2) Hertfordshire County Council has advised local planning authorities that the Herts Ecological Networks Map should be used to assess the strategic importance of habitats, and this site has been noted as being strategically significant - the highest rating.
- (3) The need, as part of the planning allocation, for the re-provision of the priority orchard habitat elsewhere in North Herts, in addition to the new Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirements. BNG makes sure that habitats for wildlife are left in a measurably better state than they were before the development and is now mandatory.
- (4) A biodiversity baseline assessment of the site in July 2024 identified a high baseline biodiversity value due to the presence of the strategically significant Priority Habitat Traditional Orchard, with mixed scrub and mature and irreplaceable trees.
- (5) Since the allocation of the site in the Local Plan the Council has declared both an ecological and climate emergency.
- (6) Settle Group concluded that a small development on the eastern section of the site with access from the garage site on Radburn Way would not be viable.
- (7) A financial assessment attached at Appendix B of the Part 2 Report, indicates residential development of the site is not viable either with access from a third-party ownership on Radburn Way or via Freeman Drive, given the additional costs of developing the site in accordance with planning and climate change requirements.

The meeting closed at 9.48 pm

Chair