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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET PANEL ON THE ENVIRONMENT

**MEETING HELD VIRTUALLY VIA ZOOM
ON WEDNESDAY, 1ST JULY, 2026 AT 7.30 PM**

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Val Bryant (Chair), Emma Fernandes, Joe Graziano, Bryony May, Caroline McDonnell, Claire Strong and Paul Ward.*

In Attendance: *Faith Churchill (PA - Director Governance), Robert Filby (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Daisy Harris (Policy & Strategy Officer), Ellie Hollingsworth (Policy & Strategy Team Leader) and Amber Smith-Howell (Policy & Strategy Officer).*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting approximately 8 members of the public, including registered speakers.*

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 04 minutes 07 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Amy Allen.

Having given due notice, Councillor Val Bryant substituted for Councillor Allen.

2 MINUTES - 1 APRIL 2026

Audio Recording – 04 minutes 39 seconds

Councillor Val Bryant, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Claire Strong seconded and, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 1 April 2026 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

3 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 05 minutes 13 seconds

- (1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be recorded.
- (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 needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.
- (3) 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.
- (4) The Chair advised that the Cabinet Panel meetings on 13 January and 17 March 2027 had been cancelled after agreement by the Executive Member for Environment in consultation with Group Leaders.

- (5) The Chair informed those present that the theme for this Panel meeting was 'Working Together to Achieve More' and that various speakers were in attendance to present on topics related to this at Agenda Item 7.
- (6) The Chair advised of a change to the order of Agenda and that Agenda Item 5 would be taken after Agenda Item 7.

4 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 06 minutes 35 seconds

There was no other business notified.

5 INFORMATION NOTE - COUNCIL ACTIVITY UPDATE AND ACTION TRACKER

Audio recording – 06 minutes 42 seconds

Officers from the Policy & Strategy Team presented the Information Note entitled 'Council Activity Update and Action Tracker' and advised that:

- There was a new action tracker for the Civic Year and all actions from the previous year had been completed.
- Any new actions identified by the Cabinet Panel would be put into the action tracker after agreement from the Chair.
- The Council had been working with the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP) to bring sustainability forward through Local Government Reorganisation.
- Participation in the 'Your Tree Our Future' scheme had resulted in nearly 15K trees being planted across the district last year, and the link to claim trees this year had been included in the Information Note.
- The Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme was progressing with Royston Leisure Centre already complete and Hitchin Swimming & Fitness Centre and North Herts Leisure Centre scheduled for completion in October.
- Design work for phase two of the project at Hitchin Town Hall and North Herts Museum was also progressing, and the planning application for decarbonisation of the North Herts Leisure Centre learner pool had been submitted.
- A report detailing Council greenhouse gas emissions had been published on the Council website and linked in the information note.
- The Climate Hive had over 1200 subscribers and continued to update residents with the latest surveys, consultations, events and activities.
- A volunteer meadow monitoring programme to assess the health of wildflower meadows in the district had been launched.
- The Council had partnered with Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation to host a community energy event at Broadway Cinema, and a recording of the film shown at this would be made available on the Council YouTube channel in due course.
- Monthly sustainability briefings would remain on the Council website.
- Sustainability Strategy actions continued to be monitored by the Political Liaison Board and the Council Climate and Sustainability Officer Group.
- Electric waste collection vehicles were in full operation, and these would further contribute to the 400 tonnes of carbon emissions already saved by using Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil as fuel.
- 93% of staff had completed the sustainability e-learning module, and frequent internal communications continued to raise staff awareness on environmental issues.
- The Warm Homes Local Grants Scheme had delivered installations to 12 homes in its first year, and installations for up to 30 homes were planned for year 2.

- The launch of the staff salary sacrifice scheme for electric vehicles would help to support the action in the Sustainability Strategy to reduce staff commuting emissions.
- A Green Procurement Checklist had been introduced for high value procurement to help officers consider how to embed sustainability into this.
- An increased use of electric equipment had been reported by the Greenspace Team.

Officers from the Policy & Strategy Team then provided a verbal update on the supplementary document to the Information Note and highlighted the following:

- The Council was part of the Upper Bedford Ouse Catchment Partnership, which brought together key stakeholders to manage its ecosystem.
- The Council was also a partner in the ResilienTogether project which aimed to improve water quality and reduce flood risk from the Pix Brook.
- Natural flood measures had recently been installed along the Pix Brook in Norton Common and Pix Meadow.
- The Senior Ecologist was working with the Planning Team to ensure the Local Plan considered the Chilterns Chalk Stream Planning Guidance.
- Details of further projects and initiatives were contained within the supplementary document.

The following Members and members of the public asked questions:

- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor Bryony May
- Sarah Perry
- Councillor Claire Strong

In response to questions, Officers from the Policy & Strategy Team advised that:

- The Greenspace Team were responsible for bee corridors and they would be contacted about the possibility of extending those to more areas.
- Outreach for the volunteer meadow monitoring programme was done through the Climate Hive and internal communications at both the Council and Hertfordshire County Council.
- 18 volunteers had signed up to the meadow monitoring programme so far.
- The Council would contact the Upper Lee Catchment Partnership about providing a representative in due course.

The following Members and member of the public participated in the discussion:

- Councillor Joe Graziano
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Sarah Perry

The following points were made as part of the discussion:

- Various parish councils in North Herts had adopted the Mimram Valley Local Landscape Designation to enhance riverbanks and protect them from development. An update on its possible implementation into the Local Plan would be provided in October.
- Volunteers monitored the water quality of both the River Oughton and River Hiz in Ickleford, and monitoring should be carried out more widely on all chalk streams in the district.
- A list of all the chalk streams should be drawn up by the Council, and they should be help volunteer organisations having a positive impact on these as much as possible.

- Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust had worked with the Council to compose restoration designs for the Rivers Purwell, Oughton, and Hiz, and some of those would be implemented in the autumn along the River Hiz in Ickleford.

6 PRESENTATIONS

Audio recording – 25 minutes 52 seconds

The Chair informed those present that the UK was one of most nature depleted countries on Earth and that in Hertfordshire specifically, 76 species had been lost in the last 50 years. However, the Chair advised that it was not too late to revive and protect nature, and that community groups, volunteers and institutions played a vital role in restoring nature and biodiversity. The Chair acknowledged that more could be done when work was carried out together, which linked to the theme of the meeting 'Working Together to Achieve More'.

The Chair invited Abbie Robinson to give a presentation, supported by slides and images, on 'How Volunteering Can Help to Support Biodiversity'. They thanked the Chair for the opportunity to present and advised that:

- Biodiversity was crucial for the smooth running of ecosystems across the planet, and humans relied upon it for food, medicines and resources.
- Ecosystem stability stemmed on the variety of species.
- Wildflowers were a way to introduce small, varied habitats into an urban setting.
- 97% of wildflower meadows in the UK had been lost since the 1930s.
- Wildflowers provided colour, helped to improve mental health, were a source of food for insects, and became nutrients for soil when they died off.
- Pollinators were big benefitters of wildflower planting, which was a good thing when bees, moths and butterflies were all declining due to climate change.
- Implementing a series of wildflower habitats built corridors across urban landscapes, which prevented them from becoming isolated and stabilised populations.
- Existing projects for pollinators included 'B-Lines' by Buglife.
- They had worked with the Council to select areas in Royston for wildflower planting, and the Council had sourced the wildflower mix, cleared and prepared those areas, planted the seeds, and continued to maintain and care for them.
- All the areas selected had succeeded except one because of parked cars.
- Lots of positive responses had been received both on social media and in person following the blooming of wildflowers in 2023, and there had been a desire for more.
- The Community had been keen to get involved, and increasing public knowledge on climate change pressures had elevated this interest.
- Volunteers were crucial as they supplied ideas and people power, and the difference in ages encouraged a positive environment.
- There was scope for volunteering of this kind in Royston, but there could always be more.
- The wildflower patches showed that collaboration could work between the Council and residents, and it was hoped that they could continue working with them, in addition to groups and communities to protect greenspaces and boost biodiversity.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Joe Graziano
- Councillor Bryony May

In response to questions, Councillor Val Bryant advised that they would contact the Grounds Maintenance Manager following the meeting regarding more wildflower planting across the district.

In response to questions, Abbie Robinson advised that they had approached the Council about implementing more wildflower patches, but they would have to follow this up with the Greenspace Team.

In response to questions, Andrew Taylor advised that:

- Hertfordshire County Council Countryside Management Service had started a project with the Greenspace Team to set up a volunteer group that would monitor the wildflower areas.
- They had also been working to establish native wildflower areas, which would also be monitored.

The Chair thanked Abbie Robinson for their presentation and invited Chris Hincliff MP for North East Hertfordshire to give a verbal presentation on 'Biodiversity and Chalk Streams'. They thanked the Chair for the opportunity to present and advised that:

- Volunteers who undertook work to protect and restore chalk streams across the North East Hertfordshire constituency were appreciated.
- The Minister for Water would be visiting the Rivel Ivel to talk to the Revival Team that had worked to reduce abstraction pressures in the chalk aquifer, which would also revive other dead chalk streams.
- England was home to 85% of chalk streams in the world, which housed a variety of biodiversity and many iconic species such as otters, water voles and rare invertebrates.
- Chalk streams had been heavily impacted by the growing demand for water, physical modification and pollutant runoff.
- Climate change presented a risk to the ecology of chalk streams as it affected their stable water temperatures that enabled egg spawning and safe habitats.
- Border management around chalk streams was essential to ensure the correct shade and vegetation.
- They had successfully got chalk streams into the draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) so that future development proposals would assess and mitigate impacts where development could have unacceptable adverse impacts on water quality.
- They had supported the bill to encourage ministers to nominate chalk streams to become UNESCO World Heritage sites.
- They had also encouraged Ofwat to reject the request for creditors of Thames Water to continue polluting rivers.
- The Rivers Rib, Quinn and tributaries to the River Beane were just some of the chalk streams affected by pollution and sewage discharges.
- Work had also been undertaken with the Rivers Trust to ensure that the forthcoming Clean Water Bill delivered for chalk streams, with particular focus on headwater streams to improve the overall water quality.

The following Members and members of the public asked questions:

- Councillor Bryony May
- Sarah Perry
- Councillor Joe Graziano
- Councillor Claire Strong

In response to questions, Chris Hincliff MP advised that:

- The letter sent by the Executive Member for Place on chalk streams had been received.
- The bill to nominate chalk streams as UNESCO World Heritage sites had not been progressed past the second reading in Parliament as it had only been presented as a 10-minute bill, but they would continue to support work on this with Pippa Heylings MP.

- Chalk streams in Devon and Dorset already designated as UNESCO World Heritage sites had experienced benefits such as stronger protection and public awareness.
- The River Mimram was one of the healthiest known chalk streams.
- Chalk streams had been included in the new Draft NPPF, but this would not apply retroactively to existing developments.
- They shared concerns with Members over the new National Scheme of Delegation of

Sarah Perry thanked Chris Hinchliff MP for their work related to chalk streams and highlighted that chalks streams such as the River Hiz still provided some of the healthiest spawning grounds for Trout despite wider challenges.

The Chair thanked Chris Hinchliff MP for their presentation and invited Heidi Hutton and Andrew Taylor to give a presentation, supported by slides and images, on 'Hertfordshire County Council Countryside Management Service and Successful Volunteer Projects'. They thanked the Chair for the opportunity to present and advised that:

- CMS was operated by Hertfordshire County Council and they received funding from the district and borough councils across Hertfordshire and worked with them to produce a work programme to manage the countryside each year.
- Volunteers had contributed 37K hours to caring for greenspaces and 20K hours towards the Healthy Walks Scheme.
- They were proud to have gold volunteering accreditation.
- Training for volunteers was provided, and tasks were led by trained leaders.
- They had helped to develop greenspace action plans.
- Support for woodland management works had been supplied.
- Projects for river restoration along the River Oughton and River Purwell were close to implementation and funding for these had been secured from Affinity Water.
- Ash Dieback had impacted Weston Hills, and they had approached this in several phases, including replanting in 2022, which had been funded by the Forestry Commission.
- There were 25 Friends Groups looking after greenspaces across the district.
- Volunteers looked after 90% of the rights of way across Hertfordshire, including those in North Herts, which had 100% coverage.
- Volunteering created a sense of ownership for those involved and provided volunteers with new skills like hedge planting.
- New tree planting had been conducted at Great Ashby, as well as thinning to favour stronger trees.
- Although 97% of chalk streams in the district had been lost, they had been lucky to maintain those that had remained.
- Some measures to increase biodiversity included scrub clearance, river de-shading, planting and removing invasive species.
- Other measures such as radar kissing gates had been installed on Oughton Common.

The Chair advised that due to time constraints, no questions would be answered verbally, and that any outstanding questions should be written in the meeting chat for speakers to respond to.

7 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 01 hours 33 minutes 32 seconds

In accordance with Standing Order 4.8.10(c), one question had been submitted by a member of the public by the required deadline set out in the Constitution.

The Chair informed those present that both the member of the public and Executive Member for Environment were unable to attend the meeting, and that they had agreed to read out the question on behalf of the member of the public, as follows:

(A) Sewage Discharge Point into Norton Common

‘There appears to be a sewage discharge point within Norton Common into the Pix Brook with sewage discharges by Anglian Water. Will the Council investigate why sewage is allowed to be discharged into a public park and if there’s anything that can be done to stop it?’

Councillor Val Bryant provided the following response:

‘Yes, we will investigate. As a Hitchin Bearton Councillor, I go to the water treatment works on Bury Mead Road quite frequently and it has improved over the years. I think that it is important that they actually visited the sites with water treatment plants, and made sure of the chalk streams in the vicinity and that the staff in the treatment plants did so as well so they had a clear view of where their water was going. Then they could look at the amounts that were being discharged within legal limits and so on. But the answer to that is yes, certainly, they would follow that up.’

The meeting closed at 9.08 pm

Chair

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