

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF EAST
HERTS COUNCIL HELD IN THE
COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS,
HERTFORD ON WEDNESDAY 23
MARCH 2005 AT 7.30 PM

PRESENT: Councillor D E Mayes (Chairman).
Councillors M R Alexander, W Ashley,
P R Ballam, H G S Banks, K A Barnes, S A Bull,
N Burdett, A L Burlton, E J Cain, M G Carver,
D Clark, R N Copping, A F Dearman, J Demonti,
A D Dodd, R Gilbert, A M Graham, J Hedley,
Mrs D L E Hollebon, Mrs D Hone, A P Jackson,
M P A McMullen, T Milner, Mrs S Newton,
R L Parker, D A A Peek, L R Pinnell, M Port, J O
Ranger, D Richards, T K H Robertson,
B W J Sapsford, M J Tindale, J P Warren and
M Wood.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Miranda Steward	- Executive Director (Returning Officer)
Rachel Stopard	- Executive Director (Head of Paid Service)
Simon Drinkwater	- Assistant Director (Law and Control)
Jeff Hughes	- Head of Democratic Services
Martin Ibrahim	- Senior Democratic Services Officer
Lorraine Kirk	- Senior Communications Officer
David Tweedie	- Assistant Director (Financial Services)

ACTION666 MINUTES

Council approved the Minutes of the meeting held on 1 March 2005, and the Minutes of the Extraordinary meeting held on 9 March 2005, as correct records, subject to the amendment of Minute 658 – Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England (RSS14) Response to the Consultation Document (December 2004), as follows:

6th paragraph, final sentence – delete ‘had been’ and ‘irrespective of planning matters’, and insert after ‘location’, ‘seemed to have been’. The sentence now read: ‘Also, she suggested that the location seemed to have been chosen because of its alleged deliverability.’

17th paragraph, 3rd sentence – delete ‘only’ and replace with ‘largely’, and delete ‘and did not contain any’, and replace with ‘rather than’. The sentence now read: ‘However, as previously stated, these were largely nice words rather than realistic measures.’

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 1 March 2005 and the Extraordinary Council meeting held on 9 March 2005, as now amended, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

667 CHAIRMAN’S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman referred to a request he had received from Councillor D Richards, as Chairman of Sawbridgeworth Council for Voluntary Services, to pass on her thanks to the Council and its officers for the help and support given in making a bid to the East of England fund for development and exemplar projects, which if successful, would lead to the establishment of a project to enable Sawbridgeworth CVS to give more practical help to local groups, such as access to computers and photocopying facilities.

ACTION

The Chairman informed Members that Nigel Bird, Caretaker at Wallfields, was retiring on 1 April 2005. He undertook to write to him expressing the Council's best wishes.

668 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members made the following declarations of interest:

- Councillor S A Bull declared a personal and prejudicial interest in the matters referred to at Minutes 623 – Stansted Area Partnership and 624 – Herts and Essex Hospital and Anchor Street Sites Affordable Housing Provision, as he was a Board member of Stort Valley Housing Association.
- Councillor R N Copping declared a personal and prejudicial interest in the matter referred to at Minute 670 – Report of the Executive, although the nature of the interest was not disclosed. He left the Chamber whilst this matter was considered.

669 MEMBERS' QUESTION

Councillor J P Warren asked the Leader of the Council if, given that the Conservative Party had stated that if elected in any forthcoming Election, they would disband the Regional assemblies, it was his view that if this happened, this would make little difference to the proposals of the East of England Plan, which was coming from GO East and EEDA and would in fact, disband a means where local democracy did have some input?

In reply, the Leader confirmed the Conservative Party's policy was to disband Regional Assemblies. He referred to the role of the Regional Assembly in respect of the Regional Spatial Strategy and the new statutory powers conferred by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, which had abolished County Structure Plans. Disbanding Regional Assemblies would not remove the new planning powers for which specific legislation would be needed.

ACTION

Also, he referred to the East of England Plan, in which there was a long way to go. He stated that over 26,000 comments had been submitted as part of the consultation. The Government's direction towards regionalism was clear, as was the Council's position. The Leader felt that the region was too big and that County Structure Plans should be reinstated as local planning issues should be determined on a local basis.

Councillor J P Warren referred to the considerable amount of thought and time that had been put into the Revised Local Plan, and asked the Leader if it was his view that the Local Plan was likely to be challenged far more often by applications, which were now being approved as a result of earlier appeals and through an Appeals procedure which allowed pockets of Green Belt Land to be developed, even against local authority planning procedures? Further, he asked whether this would not encourage developers to challenge local Authority Local Plans and start a snowballing process?

In reply, the Leader stated that he saw no reason why the emerging Local Plan should be challenged any more than the existing Plan. He agreed that a considerable amount of time and effort had gone into progressing the emerging Plan, and that the robust challenges made as part of the consultation process, had in fact, strengthened the Plan. Therefore, there ought to be fewer challenges.

Councillor J P Warren referred to the Parking Attendants that had now been operating for just over 2 months, and generally speaking, had started to control illegal parking and Attendant Patrol was not necessarily a 6 days a week commitment. He asked the Leader if it was the Executive's view, that whilst the intentions had proved successful, everyone should be very aware that the economy of East Herts' town centres was dependent on successful 9 – 6 trading? It might be that post Christmas, financial restraint had led to an economic low, but 'fines for parking (illegal)' was such a contentious issue that many residents were more inclined than ever to travel to out of town centres

ACTION

where parking was free.

In reply, the Leader referred the question to the Executive Member for Community, who was the responsible portfolio holder.

The Executive Member recalled the questions he was asked prior to the adoption of decriminalised parking enforcement, aimed at ensuring parking attendants were deployed in Buntingford as well as the other major towns in East Herts.

He was aware of traders' concerns that trading levels appeared to have reduced against previous years' levels. He was also aware that some people were blaming this on parking attendants, who were carrying out the work that the Council had voted unanimously to employ.

The Executive Member reminded Council that decriminalisation had been adopted following full consultation with residents. This had been demanded by large numbers of people who were unhappy with the culture of inconsiderate, thoughtless and dangerous parking of cars, that had developed over the previous couple of years, and which was clogging up town centres.

The Executive Member could not agree that issuing fines for anything illegal was contentious. The Council had yet to issue any new traffic orders, but was enforcing ones that had existed for years in many cases. There were many shoppers who were delighted at the changes arising from the Council's actions, as they felt safer in town centres and were able to park much easier than in the past.

The Executive Member stated that parking charges were used as an effective management tool in freeing parking spaces that would otherwise be used all day by some people who lived a short walking distance of their work. The problem, which now appeared to relate only to Buntingford, could easily be overcome if parking charges were to be introduced. He referred to a large number of supportive comments that had been received from Sawbridgeworth

ACTION

residents following the introduction of charges there last year, despite the reservations of traders.

The Executive Member concluded by stating that if sufficient spaces were available in parking areas, then there would be no reason to park on yellow lines. Such parking inconvenienced traders who had to load or unload goods, the disabled, as well others who required free passage. He expressed sympathy with traders who felt they had been affected by the loss of trade from those wished to park inappropriately. However, he could neither condone that action nor ask parking attendants to turn a blind eye, as to do so, would make him unfit to hold his position on the Council.

670 REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE

The Leader of the Council reported on the work of the Executive and presented the Minutes of the Executive meeting held on 1 March 2005. The recommendations of the Executive meeting held on 9 March had been approved by the Extraordinary Council meeting held on 9 March 2005, and as such, were presented for information only.

RESOLVED – that (A) the Minutes of the Executive meeting held on 1 March 2005, be received, and the recommendations contained therein, be adopted, and

(B) the Minutes of the Executive meeting held on 9 March 2005, be received.

671 MINUTES OF COMMITTEES(A) DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE
– 2 MARCH 2005

Council noted an error in respect of Councillor T Milner's declaration recorded at Minute 633, in that he was a Board member of Riversmead Housing Association and not Stort Valley Housing Association.

ACTION

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the Development Control Committee meeting held on 2 March 2005, be received.

(B) PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
- 8 MARCH 2005

Council noted an error in that Councillor A D Dodd attendance at this meeting had not been recorded.

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the Performance Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 8 March 2005 be received.

(C) POLICY DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
- 15 MARCH 2005

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the Policy Development Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 15 March 2005, be received.

The meeting closed at 7.56 pm

Chairman
Date