

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF EAST
HERTS COUNCIL HELD IN THE
COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS,
HERTFORD ON WEDNESDAY 8
NOVEMBER 2006 AT 7.30 PM

PRESENT: Councillor A L Burlton (Chairman).
Councillors M R Alexander, W Ashley, D R Atkins,
P R Ballam, H G S Banks, K A Barnes, S A Bull,
N Burdett, E J Cain, M G Carver, D Clark,
R N Copping, A F Dearman, J Demonti,
A D Dodd, R Gilbert, Mrs M H Goldspink,
A M Graham, J Hedley, Mrs D M Hone,
A P Jackson, G McAndrew, M P A McMullen,
J Mayes, T Milner, Mrs S Newton, R L Parker,
D A A Peek, H Penson, L R Pinnell, J O Ranger,
D Richards, P A Ruffles, S Rutland-Barsby,
B J Sapsford, G D Scrivener, J J Taylor,
J D Thornton, M J Tindale, A L Warman,
J P Warren, N Wilson, M Wood.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Anne Freimanis	- Chief Executive
Simon Chancellor	- Head of Accountancy Services
Jeff Hughes	- Head of Democratic Services
Martin Ibrahim	- Senior Democratic Services Officer
Lorraine Kirk	- Senior Communications Officer
Mary Orton	- Director of Policy and Performance
Salina Seepersand	- Solicitor

ACTION349 MINUTES

Council approved the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 20 September 2006 subject to the following amendment:

Minute 250, 17th paragraph – delete the word ‘Herts’ before ‘Highways’ and insert the word ‘Agency’ after the word ‘Highways’

Council also agreed to amend the list of Members shown to be present with the addition of Councillor D Richards.

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 20 September 2006, as now amended, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

350 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

It was moved by Councillor J O Ranger and seconded by Councillor A P Jackson that Councillor P A Ruffles be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Council for the remainder of the Civic Year 2006/07.

Council approved the appointment of Councillor P A Ruffles as Vice-Chairman of the Council for the remainder of the Civic Year 2006/07.

RESOLVED - that Councillor P A Ruffles be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Council for the remainder of the Civic Year 2006/07.

The Vice-Chairman made the statutory Declaration of Acceptance of Office.

The Vice-Chairman thanked Members for appointing him and commented that he was grateful for the opportunity to serve the people of East Hertfordshire.

ACTION351 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed Members, the press and public to the meeting.

The Chairman thanked Councillor R N Copping for his excellent work as Vice-Chairman since May 2006, and expressed his gratitude to him and his sister for their support on the many engagements they had attended.

The Chairman also thanked Members for their support of the event in aid of Isobel Hospice on 16 November 2006, and suggested that Members who were unable to attend could still support the event by purchasing raffle tickets.

The Chairman reminded Members of the joint meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Committee and Policy Development Scrutiny Committee, which would be held on 15 November 2006, at 7.30 pm, in the Waytemore Room, Bishop's Stortford.

In respect of the agenda, the Chairman advised that the motion submitted at agenda item 11 had been withdrawn.

Finally, the Chairman referred to the achievement of the Hunsdon pre-school children in reaching the national final of the "People's Millions" event and advised Members of coverage by regional television on 14 November 2006. He also suggested that Members could support the local project by participating in the telephone voting for the local project.

352 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor D Clark declared a personal interest in the matter referred to at Minute 354 – Public Question, as the question had been submitted by her husband.

ACTION353 PETITION – ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Mr Thurley of Bishop's Stortford, had submitted a petition comprising 32 signatures on behalf of local residents. The Chairman had used his discretion to accept the petition onto the agenda. The petition stated:

“This is a petition to force “somebody” to take responsibility for the youths on our streets, eg, Council, Police, Housing Association and a possibility of a curfew being put into operation, so we can walk our streets without fear of gangs of youths.”

Mr Thurley was in attendance and was invited by the Chairman to address Council.

Mr Thurley tabled an additional 73 signatures in support of the petition. He referred to the suffering being inflicted on local residents by a small minority of youths through their anti-social behaviour. This included incidents of vandalism, drinking and drug-taking, urinating in front gardens and roaming the streets in gangs late in the evening. This had the effect of instilling fear in residents.

Mr Thurley, whilst acknowledging the pressures on police resources, referred to the poor response times of the police to specific incidents, which meant that the perpetrators were not caught. He also referred to the lack of interest shown by the Housing Association.

Councillor K A Barnes, speaking as a local ward Member, expressed his support for the petition and spoke of the courage shown by the petitioner and the signatories in putting up a stand and not being intimidated. He referred to the presentation given by Chief Inspector Harbon earlier in the evening, when problems in Bishop's Stortford had been highlighted. He had been encouraged by the police's intentions to press forward with residents and commented that more input from the Housing Association would be needed. Finally, he suggested that the Housing

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Association's policies had resulted in families with no local connection moving into the area.

Councillor Mrs M H Goldspink, speaking as a local ward Member, expressed her support for the petition. She had been aware of the problems outlined by the petitioner and commented that everyone needed to redouble their efforts in tackling these issues.

The Executive Member for Community Safety responded to the petition. She expressed her sympathy for the problems outlined and had been reassured by recent activities that the petitioner had been involved in. She accepted that the anti-social behaviour caused by a small minority needed the attention of the police and the Council.

The Executive Member outlined the Council's role in increasing the provision of CCTV cameras and funding for Police and Community Safety Officers, which would help deter anti-social behaviour and combat the fear of crime. She referred to the dichotomy of the District's low crime rate and high fear of crime and suggested there was no room for complacency. The Council, in conjunction with the police, was striving to curtail the freedom of known perpetrators. However, this could only be achieved with the support of communities to identify the known perpetrators.

In respect of the fear of reprisals, the Executive Member stated that information could be provided to the police anonymously and referred to the Crimestoppers telephone number. She commented that the public could also raise concerns with their local ward Members.

Finally, the Executive Member referred to the absence of a Neighbourhood Watch scheme in the petitioner's area and expressed the hope that local residents would be interested in forming a scheme.

In response to a supplementary statement by Mr Thurley on the fear of residents and the slow response times of the police, the Executive Member encouraged residents to

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gather as much evidence as possible to assist the police.

354 PUBLIC QUESTION

Mr N Clark, Hunsdon, submitted the following question to the Leader of the Council:

“STOP Harlow North, which comprises mandated parish and town councillors from Much Hadham, Widford, Hunsdon, Eastwick and Gilston, High Wych and Allen’s Green and Sawbridgeworth, issued their brochure proposing the concept of Gilston Great Park north of Harlow on 13 October. We did so with the express intention of engaging local authorities, government agencies and the public in a debate on the ideas and how they might be improved and adopted. We have had a very encouraging response from many organisations. Professor David Lock, Chair of Town and County Planning Association, responded to our proposals saying amongst other things that “your document is very clear and professional, and must command serious attention at the local level”. Obviously the scale of such a project will require an enormous amount of partnership working. Could the Leader of the Council explain how East Herts Council, which has an extensive range of partnership working arrangements in place, can help move forward the discussions around the concept of Gilston Great Park?”

In response, the Leader of the Council commended the work of the Stop Harlow North group and their role in opposing the East of England’s proposals at the Examination in Public, which were rejected by the Inspector. The Council supported the concept and commented that the proposals would need refining as various stakeholders were involved in preparing the strategy.

In response to a supplementary question, the Leader referred to the timing of the core strategy and suggested that discussions could include stakeholders such as Harlow Green Infrastructure Group and the Groundwork Trust.

ACTION355 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Councillor M Wood asked the Leader of the Council if with regard to the Nottingham Declaration, he could confirm that the Chief Executive and himself had now signed this document.

The Leader referred the question to Councillor D A A Peek.

Councillor D A A Peek commented that Councillor M Wood would be aware that the Council had agreed to sign the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change, to which it was fully committed. However, a formal signing ceremony had been delayed until it could coincide with the opening of the eco-demonstration house, which would allow a coordinated package of environmental awareness publicity.

Councillor L R Pinnell referred to previous answers to questions about the sponsorship of roundabouts in the District at the Council meetings of 14 December 2005 and 12 April 2006, when assurances had been given at both meetings that the subject was being treated seriously and was under investigation by the Executive Member and Officers. Having recently travelled to the north of England, Councillor L R Pinnell had once again been struck by the number of sponsored roundabouts that were colourful, clean and tidy, both in the towns and the countryside. As it had been nearly a year since the question of roundabout sponsorship was first raised, Councillor L R Pinnell asked the Leader of the Council if any progress had been made and if not, why not.

In reply, the Leader referred to the opportunity for raising the standards and appearances of roundabouts in the District. However, there were complications as the Council did not actually own any of the major roundabouts. Nevertheless, detailed work had been undertaken with partners and he anticipated bringing forward proposals for the Executive to consider early in the New Year.

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Councillor L R Pinnell in welcoming the CCTV cameras currently being installed in Bishop's Stortford, Ware and Hertford as a deterrent to town centre crime and disorder, asked the Executive Member for Community Safety to inform the meeting of the current situation, including how many camera installations had been completed, whether they were now on line or when it was expected that they would go live.

In response, the Executive Member for Community Safety stated that the installations had commenced in June 2006 and were nearing completion. The columns and cameras had been installed and power supplies were being added now. The control centre at Stevenage had been proofed and it was anticipated that the system would go live in the week commencing 17 November 2006.

Councillor A M Graham ask the Leader of the Council if he believed that East Herts was an excellent provider of leisure facilities and was it the vision of this Authority to provide well maintained, quality gyms and swimming facilities, efficiently and effectively managed.

In response, the Leader commented that it would be wrong to claim excellence at the moment. He expressed his gratitude to Stevenage Leisure Limited for taking over the management of the facilities. Over the next twelve months, the Council would be preparing specifications for the tender of the new contract. During this time, there would be an opportunity for Councillor A M Graham to share his expertise in these preparations.

The Leader expressed his belief that Councillor A Graham and himself shared the same aspirations for the future of the pools, as well as other leisure facilities, such as Castle Hall. He hoped that excellence would not be too far away.

Councillor Mrs M H Goldspink asked the Leader of the Council what progress had been made with the building and fitting out of the eco-home within the District.

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The Leader referred the question to Councillor D A A Peek.

Councillor D A A Peek expressed his pleasure in announcing that the arrangements for the opening of an eco-house environmental show home were well under way. The Council was in the final stages of negotiation to ensure that the house could be open to the public, schools and interested professionals as soon as possible. It was intended that the house would be used to promote a range of environmental initiatives including energy efficiency, the use of renewable energy including water, together with waste management and recycling. Once the final arrangements had been made, it was intended to ensure maximum publicity with a coordinated environmental awareness programme, which would include the formal signing of the Nottingham Declaration.

356 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 12 September 2006.

He referred to the recent Local Government White Paper, which had included the concept of devolved budgets for ward councillors. This was an idea the Council had been looking at for a while.

The Leader quoted St Francis of Assisi in referring to the need to exercise courage and work together to improve the lives of East Herts residents. He believed the Executive had shown courage in respect of its decisions taken on the Single Non Emergency Number and in tackling environmental crime. In respect of the Bishop's Stortford Transport Strategy, this had been an example of working together.

ACTION

The Leader referred to questions that had been asked about the need for somebody to be responsible for the management of the built environment in Bishop's Stortford. He expressed his belief that the Council had this responsibility and that, as the hub of a variety of activities, the Council was best placed to provide a vision of the town centre for the next twenty years.

In respect of leisure provision, the Leader referred to the Executive's recommendation that an additional £50,000 be allocated from the capital programme for various improvements at Hartham and Grange Paddocks swimming pools.

Finally, the Leader referred to the joint meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Committee and Policy Development Scrutiny Committee on 15 November 2006, which would consider the future of the Local Strategic Partnership. He invited all Members to engage this meeting.

In response, the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group welcomed the decision taken in respect of the Single Non Emergency Number. In regard to the future of Bishop's Stortford, he welcomed the statement relating to a vision for the town centre, but commented that the Council had now missed the boat and that concerns for the town centre developments had been well documented.

In respect of the Local Government White Paper, he believed this had been a missed opportunity, serving up a rehash of old policies, such as elected mayors.

The Leader of the Independent Group expressed his appreciation for the Leader's consultations with him on a range of issues and welcomed his comments about the Authority working together.

ACTION

In respect of Minute 301 – Bishop’s Stortford Transport Strategy, Councillor Mrs M H Goldspink, whilst welcoming the Strategy, expressed her regret over the exclusion of a south eastern bypass to relieve congestion in the town.

In respect of Minute 305 – Swimming Pools Improvements, Councillor A M Graham welcomed this investment but emphasised the need for a long-term strategy.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Executive meeting held on 12 September 2006, be received, and the recommendations contained therein, be adopted.

357 MINUTES OF COMMITTEES

(A) DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE – 27
SEPTEMBER 2006

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Development Control Committee meeting held on 27 September 2006, be received.

(B) POLICY DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE – 10 OCTOBER 2006

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Policy Development Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 10 October 2006, be received.

(C) HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 19
OCTOBER 2006

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting held on 19 October 2006, be received.

ACTION(D) DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE – 25
OCTOBER 2006

Council noted that an error in the name of an applicant on a particular application would be corrected at the next Development Control Committee meeting.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Development Control Committee meeting held on 25 October 2006, be received.

358 SUBSTITUTES AT MEETINGS

The Director of Corporate Governance submitted a report seeking to amend the Constitution in respect of the arrangements for substitutes Members at meetings. It was intended that the amended process, as detailed in the report now submitted, would enable a more flexible approach to be taken.

It was suggested that the provisions be amended so that the absent Member was required to notify the Head of Democratic Services that a substitute would be attending in his/her place. There would be no requirement for the Group Leader to provide any notification.

Council supported the proposals as now detailed.

RESOLVED - that (A) substitute Members be allowed on the basis of notification being given by the absent Member and not the Group Leader; and

(B) the Director of Corporate Governance be authorised to amend the Constitution accordingly.

The meeting closed at 8.37 pm

ACTION

Chairman
Date

Nps\Council\Minutes 8 Nov 2006