

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS ON
TUESDAY, 18 MARCH 2008 AT 7.30 PM

PRESENT: Councillor J O Ranger (Chairman).
Councillors R Beeching, R N Copping, R Gilbert,
J Mayes, M Pope, R Taylor (substitute for
A M Graham), J Warren, N Wilson (substitute for
Councillor S Rutland-Barsby).

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors W Ashley, N P Clark, J Demonti,
L O Haysey, A P Jackson, C Woodward,
M J Tindale.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Anne Freimanis	- Chief Executive
Linda Bevan	- Committee Secretary
Simon Drinkwater	- Director of Neighbourhood Services
Allen Gales	- Deputy Section 151 Officer
Lorna Georgiou	- Performance and Improvement Co- ordinator
Philip Hamberger	- Director of Internal Services
Anna Osborne	- Estate Surveyor
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
George A Robertson	- Director of Customer and Community Services

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Dean Chilter	}	- Residents
Eric Fulcher		
Jackie Fulcher		

Jason Grocock	}	- Residents
Mrs Grocock		
Mr Hayne		
Andrea Trendler		
George Rowley		
Mr Jessop		- Head Teacher of School
Mrs Beverley Willis		- Chairman of School Governors

588 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors R Cheswright, K Darby, A M Graham and S Rutland-Barsby. It was noted that Councillors N Wilson and R Taylor were substituting for Councillors S Rutland-Barsby and A M Graham respectively.

RESOLVED ITEMS

ACTION

589 MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the meeting held on 12 February 2008 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

590 SALE OF LAND AT ASHENDENE ROAD, BAYFORD

The Executive Member for Resources and Internal Support submitted a report on various offers and uses that had been proposed for land at Ashendene Road, Bayford.

The land was one of a group of four sites which had recently been advertised for sale on the open market. It was the residue of land originally purchased for housing development. It included an access road from Ashendene Road, a small forecourt in front of a block of garages and an area of open land. This had been let under garden licences and maintained as a wildlife garden and part of it had been enclosed within the garden of 2 Ashendene Road. There were vehicular rights of way over the access

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road for the local school, tenants of the garages and the farmland to the rear.

Bayford was a village where limited infill development might be allowed in the Local Plan. Planning Officers had considered that the site could be suitable for one or two dwellings but the current use of part of the land as a wildlife garden would have to be taken into consideration.

The land had been identified by the Council for disposal and when advertised offers had been received from local residents as well as developers. Therefore, the Executive Member for Resources and Internal Support had sought the views of the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee before making a decision.

Offers included purchase of land for residential development and purchase by local residents for a variety of uses. These included the purchase of the wildlife garden only, the purchase of all the land, the purchase of the single plot of land which had been incorporated into a garden and purchase to provide a car park for the local school.

The wildlife garden had the support of interest groups and had won some conservation awards.

It was reported that the provision of a car park was not likely to be considered favourably by Planning Officers or Hertfordshire Highways.

Ten members of the public attended and the Chairman invited those who wished to do so to address the meeting on their proposals for the land. The Chairman explained that the Committee would listen to the views of the public and Members and consider the report of the Officers. He said the Committee would debate the matter and the Executive Member, who would be taking a non key decision on the matter, would be advised of the views of the Committee. He commented that two petitions had been received, one in support of a school car park and

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another against residential development.

Mr Rowley spoke on behalf of the Parish Council and School Governors. He explained that the school used part of the land for parents parking when bringing children to school and collecting them. It was school policy that all children should be accompanied to and from the school buildings. The school had tried to acquire the land being sold some years ago. It was still interested in using the area for parking. The use of a car park at the Memorial Hall or local public house had been suggested but was not considered suitable. It was thought using these would lead to a greater hazard for children, walking to school and crossing the road. He thought the wildlife site could be moved to a nearby piece of land if the land was used for a car park. He did not want to see the land used for housing when it could provide a village amenity. Mr Rowley considered the Council should provide this land for a car park rather than a local landowner doing so.

Mr Hayne, of 2 Ashdene Road explained that part of the land had been incorporated into his garden many years ago. He now held the land under a licence from the Council. It was bordered by an established hedgerow which provided a valuable wildlife habitat. He wished to purchase the land, and was happy to accept conditions attached to the sale preventing him from building on it. In addition, he thought the remainder of the land should be used for a community use rather than housing.

Mrs Grocock explained that she wanted the area to be retained as a wildlife site except for the area incorporated into Mr Hayne's garden. She had worked for the RSPB for many years and had helped develop the site over a number of years to improve the biodiversity of the area. The site now had a variety of habitats and supported numerous types of flora and fauna including spiders, sparrows, woodpeckers, newts, grass snakes, hedgehogs, primroses and bats. She circulated a leaflet on the range of species she claimed to have seen on the site. She said a local conservation society was willing to carry out a

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survey of the area to see if it could be designated as an official wildlife site. In response to a question, she stated that the land adjacent did not have the same high level of biodiversity.

The Council's Estate Surveyor commented that the Council was not bound to sell the land to the highest bidder if it could be disposed of for a use which was of environmental or community benefit and which was considered a better use.

Members noted the different uses to which the land could be put. They thought the environmental uses were beneficial to the local community. However, the needs of the school and the safety of children attending it were also very important.

The Committee decided to inform the Executive Member of the views now detailed.

RESOLVED - that the Executive Member be informed that the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee considers:-

- (A) the land at Ashdene Road, Bayford should not be sold for housing;
- (B) the land incorporated into the garden of 2 Ashdene Road should be sold to Mr Hayne on a conditional basis;
- (C) when the remainder of the land was disposed of it should be on a leasehold basis;
- (D) a survey should be carried out to assess if the wildlife area could be designated officially as a wildlife site and the matter should be considered further by the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee when the results of the survey were available; and

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- (E) the school should be advised that it should investigate producing a travel plan with the County Council and the provision of school car park on land adjacent to the site.

591 REPORT OF PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
TASK AND FINISH GROUP

A report was submitted on the Performance Indicators Task and Finish Group. The Group had been set up to identify a suite of priority indicators for future monitoring.

The report recommended indicators that should feature in regular monitoring reports to the Corporate Management Team (CMT), Executive and the Scrutiny Committees. The task and finish group would reconvene to assess how targets included in the Local Area Agreement (LAA) affected East Herts Council's performance indicators (PIs) and Members would be involved in reviewing PIs to decide if they were achieving their original purpose.

The Group also recommended that Service Plans should refer to key PIs and that Scrutiny Committees be responsible for the PIs set out in the Appendix to the report now submitted.

In response to a question, Councillor N Clark explained the list of PIs had expanded when the Group had attempted to include national PIs suggested by the Government. He emphasised that it was intended that the PIs would be reviewed regularly to decide which should be considered by Members or Officers only. The Task and Finish Group intended to reconvene and present a further report to the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee. He also pointed out that not every PI would be reported monthly and some would only be reported annually.

The Committee thanked the Group for its work and supported the recommendations in the report as an interim report.

ACTION

RESOLVED - that the Group be thanked for its work and the recommendations in the report of the Performance Indicators Task and Finish Group be commended to the Executive as an interim report.

592 CORPORATE HEALTHCHECK - QUARTERLY MONITORING (OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2007)

A report was submitted on exceptions to finance, performance and risk monitoring for East Herts Council for the third quarter period for 2007/08. Information on key operational and strategic risk registers was also provided.

It was reported that the Council collected a number of indicators to monitor performance. These formed part of the performance management system. The report included comments on exceptions from all Divisions in the Council.

Members noted the report and asked that the Executive be informed that work on restoring the Moat in Bishop's Stortford should be supported.

RESOLVED - that the report be noted and the Executive be informed of the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee's view that East Herts Council should support restoration of the Moat at The Castle Grounds, Bishop's Stortford.

593 CORPORATE STRATEGIC PLAN 2008-2011

A report was submitted on a three year corporate strategic plan. This replaced the annual strategic plan and the Best Value Performance Plan. It outlined what the Authority would do in the next three years and would be updated annually.

Details of how the Council had performed each year had continued to be reported through the Council's Annual Report.

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Central Government had indicated how much grant it would be giving to local authorities over the next three years and this had enabled the Council to plan in the longer term.

Information on how the plan would be implemented would be included in individual Service Plans each year and the Council's six priorities would be streamlined during 2008.

Members welcomed the Plan but considered some drafting amendments should be made to make it more user-friendly for the public.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be informed that
(A) the draft Corporate Strategic Plan for 2008-2011 as attached at Appendix A8 of the report now submitted be approved, subject to the drafting amendments suggested at the meeting; and

(B) authority to make final non-material changes should be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council.

594 RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

A report was submitted on the revised Risk Management Strategy. The Strategy had been reviewed by the Corporate Risk Management Group. Details of the risk assessment process and an impact/likelihood matrix had been included. New training arrangements for Members and the role of the Council's Audit Committee in monitoring the development and operation of risk management had also been included. A new section on risk management and partnerships had been added to the document.

Members discussed the items underlined in the document and agreed to some minor amendments. The Committee agreed to support the strategy, subject to the inclusion of these amendments.

ACTION

RESOLVED - that Council be informed that the Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee considers the revised Risk Management Strategy should be approved, in accordance with Financial Regulations, subject to the amendments suggested at the meeting.

595 AMENDMENTS TO THE COUNCIL'S FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

A report was submitted on amendments to the Council's Financial Regulations and Procedures which formed part of the Constitution to assist the Council in dealing with financial matters.

The Financial Regulations had been rewritten to make them easier to follow and apply and give greater flexibility whilst retaining effective controls.

Proposals to revise the Capital Strategy Group, Asset Management Group and IT Strategy Group would be considered by the Council meeting considering these regulations.

Members noted the commentary in italics highlighting changes to the regulations and made some comments. The Committee decided to inform the Executive that the regulations should be approved subject to the inclusion of these comments.

RESOLVED - that Council be informed that the amendments to the Financial Regulations and Financial Procedures contained in the Constitution as attached at Appendix A10 to the report now submitted be approved, subject to the inclusion of comments made at the meeting.

ACTION596 WORK PROGRAMME 2008/09

The Chief Executive submitted a report inviting the Committee to review its work programme.

The Chairman explained the Service Plans would be the main item in May and an extra meeting would be needed in June to discuss the Budget Process Review.

RESOLVED - that the work programme for 2008/09 as attached in Appendix A11 to the report now submitted be approved subject to the consideration of Service Plans as the main item in May and the Budget Process Review at a meeting to be arranged in June.

The meeting closed at 9.50 pm.