

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
EXECUTIVE HELD IN THE COUNCIL
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
TUESDAY 28 NOVEMBER 2023, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor B Crystall (Leader)
Councillors C Brittain, A Daar, J Dumont,
V Glover-Ward, M Goldspink, S Hopewell,
T Hoskin and C Wilson.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors S Bull and C Redfern.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Richard Cassidy	- Chief Executive
James Ellis	- Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer
Laura Guy	- Principal Planning Officer
Steven Linnett	- Head of Strategic Finance and Property
Katie Mogan	- Democratic Services Manager
Oliver Rawlings	- Service Manager (Licensing and Enforcement)
Sara Saunders	- Head of Planning and Building Control

Helen Standen - Deputy Chief Executive

211 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

212 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader reminded Members that the meeting was being streamed to YouTube and Members should remember to use the microphones.

213 MINUTES - 3 OCTOBER 2023

Councillor Goldspink proposed, and Councillor Daar seconded a motion that the Minutes of the meeting held on 3 October 2023 be approved as a correct record and be signed by the Leader. On being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 3 October 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

214 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

215 CONSIDERATION OF MANDATING CARD PAYMENT FACILITIES IN LICENSED VEHICLES

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth submitted a report on the consideration of mandating card payment facilities in licensed vehicles. She said that the key purpose of the council's licensing regimes was to ensure public safety and the proposed policy would help ensure people had more payment options when getting a taxi and confirmed that cash would still be accepted. She said that the taxi trade in East Herts were formally consulted and 96% of responses were positive with 94% already having card payment facilities in their vehicles.

The Executive Member said that the Police and Crime Commissioner had previously raised the issue as a safeguarding concern and two other local authorities in Hertfordshire had mandated card payment facilities and it was hoped that it would be introduced county wide.

Councillor Glover-Ward proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported. Councillor Dumont seconded the proposal.

Councillor Wilson said that he worked for the Transport for London who had introduced a similar policy and had no problems. He said he supported the policy.

Councillor Daar said she was pleased to hear that cash was remaining as a payment method.

The motion to support the recommendation having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – To recommend to Council the proposed Policy to introduce a requirement to provide card payment facilities in all vehicles licensed by East Herts Council.

216 WATTON-AT-STONE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth presented the report for the Watton-at-Stone Neighbourhood Plan. She said that the plan showed how engaged residents were in the district and the Parish Council had taken a proactive approach to meeting the District Plan's housing requirements for the village. This was the first Neighbourhood Plan that had released land from the green belt with the allocation of two strategic sites which met and exceeded the required growth thereby delivering significant community benefits.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said that the Examiner's report concluded that the Plan was of a very high quality with a particular emphasis on it being well researched, well evidenced and clearly laid out. She said that the support of the community was demonstrated in the referendum with 95% of votes in favour of the plan.

Councillor Glover-Ward proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported. Councillor Hopewell seconded the proposal.

Councillor Hoskin said that he was interested as to why Watton-at-Stone had gone over and above the

requirements in their plan and whether it was worth understanding the community benefits and whether others may consider the same approach.

The Principal Planning Officer said that they had a very strong desire to improve active travel in the area, so want to create a circular walk to ensure the development was connected to the village centre and station. They also want to deliver new football pitches and a wetland meadow.

The motion to support the recommendation having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED - To recommend to Council that the Watton-at-Stone Neighbourhood Area Plan 2017-2033, as detailed at Appendix A to this report, be formally made (adopted).

217 WARE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth presented the report on the adoption of the Ware Neighbourhood Plan. She said that the plan designated local green spaces and contained policies that would preserve the heritage of the town. The plan also sought to provide sustainable development opportunities within the context to maintain the distinctive historical character of Ware.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said that the Examiner's report praised an excellent Neighbourhood Plan for its presentation and the

supporting text underpinning the policies. She said the plan went to a referendum in September 2023 and 91% voted in favour of the plan.

Councillor Glover-Ward proposed that the recommendations in the report be supported. Councillor Brittain seconded the proposal.

Councillor Redfern asked what the turnout was for the referendum.

The Principal Planning Officer confirmed the turnout was 16.6%. Councillor Redfern said that seemed quite a low turnout.

The Principal Planning Officer said that turnout for neighbourhood plan referendums varied, the highest turnouts for a Neighbourhood Plan referendum were about 30%. She said that there was a lot of local publicity for the vote.

Councillor Dumont said that the most important thing was that 91% voted in favour of the plan. He said this was an opportunity for residents to have their say and councillors should encourage turnout.

The motion to support the recommendation having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED - to recommend to Council that the Ware Neighbourhood Area Plan 2021-2033, as detailed at Appendix A to this report, be formally made (adopted).

218 LAND AT WALKERN ROAD (WAS3) MASTERPLANNING
FRAMEWORK

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth presented the recommendation in the report. She said that the WAS3 site had been allocated for 60 homes within the Watton-at-Stone Neighbourhood Plan and was the first plan site that met the requirement in the District Plan to prepare a masterplan.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said that there was a strong vision for the site developed by the steering group established to shape the masterplan including council officers, members, and the developer. She said there was a framework for sustainable, low carbon, landscape led development and a strong emphasis on enhancing active travel.

Councillor Glover-Ward proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported.
Councillor Daar seconded the proposal.

Councillor Daar said it would be interesting to hear what local residents thought of the masterplan and its contents.

The Principal Planning Officer said that the masterplan was developed alongside the Neighbourhood Plan so would not have been a surprise to residents as there had been ongoing consultation over the last eight years. She said that this was a positive example of the community being involved in the process and was displayed in the 95% approval vote at the referendum

even with two strategic site allocations.

Councillor Hoskin asked if the masterplan leaned on the Neighbourhood Plan and if there was good dialogue between them.

Councillor Glover-Ward said that she presented the Neighbourhood Plan first as the site was allocated in the plan so the masterplan has followed on from the Neighbourhood Plan.

Councillor Crystall said that he had attended the master planning sessions and said there was a positive relationship between the resident group and the developer team.

The motion to support the recommendation having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED - To recommend to Council that the Land at Walkern Road Masterplan Framework Document, for the Watton-at-Stone Neighbourhood Plan site allocation known as WAS3, as detailed in Appendix A to this report, be agreed as a material consideration for Development Management purposes.

219 HARLOW AND GILSTON GARDEN TOWN - JOINT COMMITTEE

The Leader of the Council presented the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town – Joint Committee report. He said that the council were working with two county

councils; Herts and Essex and two district councils; Epping Forest and Harlow on the Garden Town which meant that some decision making was slow. The proposal in the report would allow for more agile decision making and make the process more transparent and accountable to public scrutiny.

The Leader of the Council made it clear that planning decisions and strategic plan making would remain with the constitute partners and the joint committee would enable cross border strategic decision making and policy making. He added that if all partners could not agree or officers could not negotiate a shared solution, then the option was still available for councils to withdraw.

Councillor Crystall proposed that the recommendations in the report be supported. Councillor Goldspink seconded the proposal.

Councillor Dumont referred to recommendation (c) in the report which asked the Executive to delegate any necessary minor amendments to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services. He asked what these amendments would be made to.

The Head of Planning said that the report and the inter-authority agreement had been through each council's democratic process and had already been considered by Harlow, Hertfordshire and Epping Forest. She said there could be some minor changes in relation to clarification points that had been picked up along the way. She said that some of the changes might relate to small points and it would be best

placed for the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to agree those.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services said that if the delegation was not agreed, all changes would have to go through the democratic process each time. He said that any minor amendments would be reported back to the committee.

Councillor Goldspink said she was strongly in favour of the proposals. She said that the new committee would speed up decision making which would be a great advantage.

Councillor Hoskin referred to the option of councils being able to leave the partnership and asked for more clarity. Councillor Crystall said there were a lot of stages to go through before the final option.

The Head of Planning added that there was a clause in the agreement relating to the termination of the partnership. She said that if the partnership could not reach an agreement, officers would want to make sure that any issues were worked through by officers in the first instance. She said that officers would not put any proposals forward for a decision that put the committee in a difficult position.

Councillor Dumont asked about the process for making members aware should the unlikely event happen that the committee could not come to an agreement.

The Head of Planning said that each council's Overview

and Scrutiny process still applied and any issues within the joint committee would be reported.

The motion to support the recommendation having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – That (A) the proposal for the establishment of a Joint Committee (JC) in respect of matters pertaining to the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town be supported;

(B) Subject to all Garden Town partner authorities approving the Agreement, the arrangements set out in the Inter Authority Agreement at Appendix 1 to this report be endorsed and agreed;

(C) Authority be delegated to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, in consultation with the Leader, to make any necessary, nonconsequential and minor amendments and refer to the HGGT Chair and Director; and

(D) Authority be delegated to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to make consequential amendments to the Council's constitution to facilitate the establishment of the Joint Committee on the basis of the Terms of Reference set out in Schedule 10 of the Inter Authority Agreement once all constituent Councils have confirmed their approval of the Agreement.

220 A LISTENING COUNCIL

The Executive Member for Resident Engagement presented the Listening Council report. He said that the report was designed to change to culture of the council when engaging with residents and that previously, East Herts had used the same channels to consult with residents and the same people responded each time.

The Executive Member for Resident Engagement said that the report set out a framework about how to consult with residents and provided a set of principles about how the council could find the groups that did not often get involved. He said that during the last election campaign, many residents expressed that they felt they were not being listened to and this document was a response to that to help them feel more engaged in the decision making process.

Councillor Wilson proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported. Councillor Dumont seconded the proposal.

Councillor Goldspink said that she strongly supported the recommendation. She said that an accepted principle and ethos of the council was to always listen to its residents. She said that members were here to serve their residents and said that they were much more likely to be able to do that if they knew what they think and need. She said that the council needed to engage with all residents, not just those who were interested and engaged in the political process.

Councillor Dumont said he strongly endorsed the recommendation and said it was a good starting point. He said that culture change did not happen overnight, and the document was a good foundation to learn and improve. He added that the council needed to make sure that it consulted with a wider and more diverse section of the community as possible.

Councillor Crystall said the document would help change the way Members worked over the next four years. He thanked Councillor Wilson and the Head of Housing and Health for driving it forward.

The motion to support the recommendation having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that the draft ‘A Listening Council’ set of principles for informing, engaging and consulting residents, businesses and stakeholders be endorsed for public consultation.

221 COMMUNITY FORUMS AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT FORUMS

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth presented the report on Community and Development Management Forums and said that the report acknowledged the importance of community engagement in the planning process. The report proposed setting up community forums for strategic sites across the district to assist with communication and engagement with residents. The Community

Forums would provide an opportunity for developers, residents, community groups, members and council officers to engage with each other over the lifetime of a development.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said the report also outlined the set-up of a Development Management Forum for applications that met certain criteria so that the sharing of any planning concerns raised by residents could be addressed early on in the process. The Development Management Forum would be set up for complex or sensitive major planning applications of more than 50 homes. She said the report had been discussed thoroughly by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and had taken on board some of their suggestions.

Councillor Glover-Ward proposed that the recommendations in the report be supported. Councillor Wilson seconded the proposal.

Councillor Redfern felt that the report was a good idea but she asked for further clarification about how the Development Management Forum would work and whether it would be multiple forums or one.

Councillor Glover-Ward said that currently, members of the public only get three minutes to speak at the Development Management Committee. The Forum would be a way of members of the public being able to present their issues with the development and help to provide solutions. The Forum would have members of the Development Management Committee attending and the council would expect developers to come

along and listen.

Councillor Redfern asked if this was a meeting where residents could present their views. She said that the report mentioned that there would be three resident representatives allowed to speak.

Councillor Glover-Ward said that the Forum was designed to be more structured than an open public meeting so residents would need to select three representatives as opposed to everyone getting a chance to speak.

Councillor Daar welcomed the paper and said that it would be helpful in bridging the gap between developers and residents.

Councillor Goldspink spoke in her role as a Bishop's Stortford Town Council planning member and said she welcomed the report as the Town Council planning committee often did not feel heard by the district council.

Councillor Dumont asked how the three resident representatives were selected.

The Head of Planning said that any representative that wanted to address the Forum needed to receive 25 signatures from residents to submit a request and residents would need to coordinate this themselves.

Councillor Glover-Ward said that the Community Forums would be more like a public town hall meeting.

Councillor Redfern thanked the Executive Member for clarification on her questions.

Councillor Crystall referred to page 420 which provided a diagram to explain the process.

The motion to support the recommendation having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that (A) the proposal for setting up Community Forums for Strategic Sites as outlined in Appendix A be agreed; and

(B) the proposal for establishing a Development Management Forum as outlined in Appendix B be agreed.

222 HEALTH AND SAFETY – WARD FREMAN POOL

The Executive Member for Wellbeing presented the recommendation about the closure of the Ward Freman pool in Buntingford. She said that shortly after the administration were elected, they were made aware that the Ward Freman pool needed several repairs and there was concern about the filtration system and the tiles on the pool. There had been increased testing of the water quality at the pool and the council were recently informed that the risk was too great to leave the pool open after December 2023.

The Executive Member for Wellbeing said that the costs of repairs were high and questions had been asked whether the filtration system could be repaired.

She said that the advice she had received said that this would require a complete replacement of the filtration system which would require the pool to be drained and there were concerns about the sides of the pool potentially collapsing without the pressure of the water.

The Executive Member for Wellbeing said she had visited Buntingford to present the problems with the pool and to gather feedback from residents. She said that there was a petition gathering signatures from residents to keep the pool open which currently had about 1,000 signatures. She said, on behalf of residents, that she felt angry and disappointed that pool had not been maintained by both the Conservative administrations of East Herts Council and Herts County Council. She added that a lack of repairs under the Conservative administrations meant much high costs now and money had been spent on a large car park in Bishop's Stortford and new leisure centres in the larger towns with the smaller towns missing out.

The Executive Member for Wellbeing said this had put the new administration in an incredibly challenging and unwanted position to try and fund the upgrades to the pool. She said they were determined to find a solution to the funding issues and said that the residents of Buntingford felt strongly about this matter. She said despite the current situation, she had had amazing offers of help from the residents of Buntingford and would use the next few months to explore funding options with Herts County Council and other partners to help resolve the issue.

Councillor Hopewell proposed that the recommendation in the report be supported. Councillor Goldspink seconded the proposal.

Councillor Brittain said the closure of the pool was a total blow to Buntingford and he echoed what the Executive Member for Wellbeing had said. He thanked the residents of Buntingford who came to the presentations and shared good ideas and it was heartening to see the community coming together to offer help and support. He said he wanted to assure residents that the administration will continue to work with residents to find a solution and hoped that the pool would reopen soon.

Councillor Goldspink said she supported the recommendation but was dismayed and angry at the situation. She supported the recommendation in order to keep residents safe and wondered if there was any merit in sending a letter to Herts County Council asking them to step up and provide the 40% of costs that they were supposed to do originally.

Councillor Crystall said that was a good point and said he would discuss with the Executive Member and officers.

Councillor Glover-Ward said that she knew Councillors Hopewell and Brittain, officers, and Everyone Active had worked hard to explore options to try and keep the pool open. She said it had become evident that that was not possible. She said that the Ware Lido had recently been refurbished including replacing the tank and suggested that it might be worth discussing with

the company that undertook the works to see if they could help with Ward Freman.

Councillor Crystall thanked officers who had worked hard over the last few weeks to get information from the County Council.

Councillor Hopewell echoed Councillor Crystall's comments and thanked officers for dealing with her questions. She said she was also thankful for the residents who had stepped up and were keen to see what they could do to save the community asset.

Councillor Dumont said that swimming was very important in his family and said that the swimming pool was a key resource for the residents of Buntingford. He made the point that the Executive Members had not been elected to close swimming pools and stood for the exact opposite. He said they had been presented with one option to close the pool for health and safety reasons. He said that residents looked to the council to provide services and the current administration were having to firefight inherited problems. He said there was one positive from the situation and that was for the council to promote health and wellbeing and make it a priority to get people swimming. He asked the Executive Member for Wellbeing to work with him to review the council's leisure strategy to promote health and wellbeing.

Councillor Bull said he used to swim five days a week and said it would be a sad day when the pool closed. He said Buntingford residents would have to travel 13 miles to the nearest pool and hoped that a solution

could be found to save the pool.

Councillor Goldspink asked the Head of Strategic Finance and Property to provide advice about meeting some of the costs required.

The Head of Strategic Finance and Property said that he would be able to provide advice to the Executive at their meeting on 21 December 2023 where they would be presented with the budget report.

Councillor Dumont said the reality was that the money was not there.

Councillor Crystall thanked Executive Members for talking to residents and looking towards next steps to ensure the pool was not lost even if the council could not afford to provide the money.

Councillor Daar said this was a good practical example of a listening council and how the administration wanted to develop moving forward.

The motion to support the recommendation having been proposed and seconded was put to the meeting and upon a vote being taken, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED - To close the pool at the end of the school term in December while further investigations can be undertaken as to potential solutions to remedy the health and safety concerns.

223 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 8.20 pm

Chairman

Date