

Borough, Parish and Town Councils
13 October 2014

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the BOROUGH, TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS held on Monday 13 October 2014 at 6.30pm in the Maple Room, Salvation House, Welwyn Garden City.

PRESENT: WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

Councillor J. Dean (Leader of the Council) (Chairman)

Councillor A. Franey (Deputy Leader and Executive Member, Resources)

Councillor R. Trigg (Executive Member, Planning, Housing and Community)

HATFIELD TOWN COUNCIL

Councillor M.Clark

C.Lloyd (Clerk)

ESSENDON PARISH COUNCIL

Councillor A. Steele

NORTHAW AND CUFFLEY PARISH COUNCIL

J. Grocock (Clerk)

WELWYN PARISH COUNCIL

Councillor M. Benson

Councillor B. Morris

WOOLMER GREEN PARISH COUNCIL

Councillor P. Corke

J.Pearce (Clerk)

OFFICIALS

PRESENT: Director (Finance and Operations) (P.Kettle)
Director (Governance) (B. Baldock)
Director (Strategy and Development) (T. Saunders)
Head of Planning (C. Haigh)
Committee Manager (R. Burbidge)

1. MINUTES:

The Minutes of the meeting held on 29 April 2014 were approved as a correct record.

2. MINUTES OF SPECIAL EXPENSES MEETING HELD ON 12 AUGUST 2014:

The Minutes of the Special Expenses meeting held on 12 August 2014 were submitted.

Arising from consideration of Minute 3(b) - Open Spaces, it was confirmed that Welwyn Parish Council had now submitted a business plan to the Borough

Council in connection with the management of Digswell Playing Fields.

With regard to Minute 4(c) – Council Tax Leaflet the Director (Finance and Operations) advised that she had still not received the leaflet based on that used by St. Alban's Council. Carrie Lloyd indicated that she would take the matter up with Alan Witherick (Clerk to Welwyn Parish Council).

It was agreed that, subject to the foregoing, the minutes be noted.

3. CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PLANNING SYSTEM:

The Head of Planning gave a presentation on recent changes to the Planning System especially with regard to –

- More permitted development rights
- Poor performance = designated authority
- Appeals
- Conservation Area consent
- Encouragement for neighbourhood planning

He then outlined a number of future changes proposed, viz -

- Three tier system = majors, minors with prior notification, minors without prior notification
- Local Development Orders
- Council responsibility for sustainable drainage
- National house size standards
- New definition of Gypsies and Travellers

In terms of the future and challenges for the Planning Service he foresaw that that there would be –

- More emphasis on pre-application advice
- More Planning Performance Agreements
- More applications but less fee income
- Challenge to recruit staff
- New IT system

In response to questions raised the Head of Planning advised that there were threshold figures relating to the number of dwellings (10 units) and/or the size (1,000 square metres) which determined whether a development was classified as major or minor. Government consultation on national housing standards were expressed as gross internal floor area (GIA) which had to be met but could be exceeded. It was based on number of bedrooms, number of bed spaces and number of storeys, but essentially started at 37 square metres for a studio flat, 60-80 square metres for a 2-bed property, 74-108 square metres for a 3-bed property, up to 138 square metres for a 6-bed property. It also prescribed minimum sizes and widths for single and double bedrooms

and stated that every 2-bed dwelling should have at least one double/twin bedroom.

There was also a consultation on planning and travellers. The consultation proposed a number of changes to existing guidance on planning for gypsies and travellers. This included amending the definition of travellers so that it was limited to those people who have a nomadic way of life; that traveller site development in open countryside should be very strictly limited; and within the Green Belt, where a five year supply of deliverable sites could not be demonstrated that this would no longer be a significant material consideration when determining planning applications for temporary permission. There were different deadlines for responding to the various consultations.

It was hoped that the new IT system to deal with the administration of planning applications would be in place by September 2015. When the system went live it would include all existing electronic records and should be much more user friendly for members of the public looking at planning applications and planning history.

4. UPDATE ON THE WELWYN HATFIELD LOCAL PLAN:

The Head of Planning gave a presentation and explained that the Local Plan would –

- Provide a vision for the future of the borough
- Meet objectively assessed development needs
- Include an objectively assessed need for 12,500 homes and up to 12,000 jobs by 2031
- Satisfy the Duty to Co-operate with adjoining authorities
- Maintain a five year supply of housing land
- Look to distribute growth proportionately
- Avoid being found to have an Unsound Plan and the risk of planning by appeal.

He explained that the Duty to Co-operate was a legal test to demonstrate that there had been effective engagement with neighbouring authorities. While the Local Plan would fail if no attempts to co-operate with other authorities had been made, it was not a duty to agree. To satisfy the Duty to Co-operate would require debate with –

- Authorities in housing and employment market areas
- Strategic cross-boundary issues, e.g. A1(M), rail network
- Herts Infrastructure and Planning Panel
- Herts Local Enterprise Partnership
- Statutory Bodies such as the Highways Agency and the Environment Agency

Officers would provide the Council's Cabinet and Housing Panel with –

- An introduction to the Local Plan
- A planning summary of all promoted sites
- A map of all promoted sites

Sites would be categorised as 'more favourable', 'less favourable' or 'finely balanced' and Members would be invited to express relevant planning views on sites to inform public consultation.

Following debate on the sites at the Panel during October, a consultation document would be finalised in December for public consultation in early 2015, with further consultation in late 2015. The Plan would then be submitted to the Department for Communities and Local Government in early 2016 for public examination in spring 2016 and adoption by mid 2016.

In response to questions raised the Head of Planning advised that any comments about the methodology used to calculate the figures for each village could be submitted as part of the public consultation. With regard to the question of drainage in villages, it was confirmed that various elements of infrastructure would be looked at as part of the Local Plan process. Many authorities in Hertfordshire were at a similar point in their process as Welwyn Hatfield and it was not envisaged that the need to talk with them as part of the Duty to Co-operate would delay the submission of the Plan in early 2016. If minor modifications were required by the Inspector as part of the Public Examination then these could be agreed by the Council but if more major changes had to be made then there would be a need to re-consult.

5. OPENNESS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT BODIES REGULATIONS 2014:

The Director (Governance) reported that the legislation which provided for the press and public to film and digitally report from all public meetings of local government bodies also covered Parish Councils and Parish Meetings. A report had been submitted to the Borough's Standards Committee on 22 September 2014 about the Regulations and a protocol was being developed to provide guidance on acceptable conduct for the filming, recording and photographing of meetings and the use of traditional and social media tools.

It was confirmed that following advice from their National Association the model Standing Orders of constituent authorities of the Welwyn Hatfield Association of Local Councils had been amended to take account of the Regulations.

The Director (Governance) also reported that although the changes about filming and digitally reporting meetings had been widely publicised, Part 3 of the Regulations also introduced another change which required the publication of certain decisions made by officers.

6. NEXT MEETING:

It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled to be held on Monday 13 April 2014.

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Meeting ended 7.35 pm
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