

## HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the COUNCIL held in the Burgess Hall, St Ivo Leisure Centre, Westwood Road, St Ives PE27 6WU on Wednesday, 21 April 2010.

PRESENT: Councillor J W Davies – Chairman.

Councillors J D Ablewhite, M G Baker, K M Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, I C Bates, J T Bell, Mrs B E Boddington, P L E Bucknell, K J Churchill, Mrs K E Cooper, S J Criswell, Mrs J A Dew, D B Dew, P J Downes, J J Dutton, R W J Eaton, R S Farrer, J E Garner, A N Gilbert, P M D Godfrey, P Godley, J A Gray, A Hansard, D Harty, Mrs P A Jordan, P G Mitchell, A Monk, M F Newman, D J Priestman, P D Reeve, Mrs D C Reynolds, T V Rogers, J M Sadler, T D Sanderson, Saunderson, M F Shellens, Mrs P E Shrapnel, L M Simpson, C J Stephens, P A Swales, G S E Thorpe, R G Tuplin, P R Ward, J S Watt and R J West.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors W T Clough, C R Hyams, L W McGuire and Ms M J Thomas.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr D L Hall.

### 85. PRAYER

Father J Pullen, Vicar of All Saints Church, St. Ives opened the meeting with Prayer.

### 86. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

#### (a) Royal Visits

The Chairman reported that he had had the pleasure to welcome both Her Royal Highness Princess Royal and Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Gloucester to Huntingdonshire on 31st March and 13th April 2010 respectively to open new community facilities in Huntingdon and St Neots.

#### (b) Chairman's Reception

The Chairman reminded Members of the arrangements for his reception to be held on 14th May 2010 in the new Civic Suite, invitations for which had been issued.

(c) **Civic Suite**

The Chairman indicated that he was pleased to announce that the annual meeting of the Council would be held in the new Civic Suite at Pathfinder House, Huntingdon and on behalf of the Council, he thanked the Democratic Services Team for their efforts in ensuring that meetings held in the various parts of the District had been conducted satisfactorily over the previous 18 months while the new accommodation was being constructed.

(d) **Membership of the Council**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor C M Saunderson to his first meeting of the Council since his election as Member for Fenstanton Ward at a by election held on 25th February 2010.

The Chairman also referred to the impending retirement of Councillors J E Garner, A N Gilbert, L W McGuire, D Priestman and J M Sadler all of whom had indicated that they were not seeking re-election to the District Council in May 2010. The Council recorded their thanks to those Members for their services during their respective periods of office and extended best wishes to them and their families for their future.

Councillor M G Baker added his tribute to the contributions made to the life of the Council by Councillors J E Garner and J M Sadler.

(e) **Fen Soundscape Project**

The Council was advised of the commencement of the 2010 Fen Soundscape project which involved young people working with professional musicians and composers to write, record and edit music inspired by the Great Fen.

**87. PETITION**

The Chairman invited Mr R Emmette to present a petition on behalf of 221 signatories regarding their concern at the proposed closure of public conveniences in Ramsey, St. Ives, St. Neots, Huntingdon and Godmanchester.

On behalf of the petitioners, Mr Emmette suggested that it was unreasonable to expect residents and visitors to the District to use facilities in local restaurants and shops, that use of the Riverside Park and the number of visitors to the District would decrease and that he was hopeful that the town councils would be able to assume responsibility for the facilities.

Following questions from Members, it was

**RESOLVED**

that the petition be referred for consideration to the Cabinet.

**88. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 17th February 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**89. MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

No declarations were received.

**90. BY-ELECTION - 25TH FEBRUARY 2010**

The Returning Officer reported that Mr C M Saunderson had been elected to the Office of District Councillor for the Fenstanton Ward at a by-election held on 25th February 2010.

**91. COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES**

The Chairman reminded Members of the decision made by the Council to suspend Council Procedure Rule 11 (Rules of Debate) to enable headline debates and "White Paper" proposals to be discussed by Members in an open manner. The Council therefore

RESOLVED

that Council Procedure Rule 11 (Rules of Debate) be suspended for the duration of the discussion on Minute Nos. 92 and 93, during which time the common law rules of debate be observed by Members and applied by the Chairman.

**92. COUNCIL DEBATE**

Councillor L M Simpson, Deputy Leader of the Council invited Councillor K M Baker, the Council's representative on the Local Government Association's Rural Commission to open a debate entitled "What action can the Council take to promote the well-being of rural communities in Huntingdonshire?"

Councillor Baker reminded Members that Huntingdonshire remained a predominantly rural District with over 80,000 people living outside the market towns. In terms of the well-being of those residents, Councillor Baker referred to the difficulties experienced by those who lived in villages and the countryside, experiencing poor access to services, such as transport, shops, post offices and to facilities such as leisure centres, cinemas and broadband access. To redress the shortfall, Councillor Baker challenged his colleagues to work closely with partners and to exert influence and pressure to seek additional infrastructure provision. He also drew attention to the recent publication of a draft "Cambridgeshire Rural Strategy" by Cambridgeshire Together which had identified six priorities for action and invited Members to come forward with ideas to respond to and promote the well-being of the rural communities.

Councillor P L E Bucknell questioned whether the Council's planning policies were helping or hindering the provision of local services and he referred to the example of the difficulties in establishing a local

shop in Wistow. Councillor P G Mitchell drew attention to the problems of anti-social behaviour in villages and the potential impact that improved facilities might have in resolving these difficulties especially if Section 106 Agreement receipts could be made more flexible to assist smaller rural settlements. Councillor R J West commended the publication of the draft rural strategy for Cambridgeshire and in particular highlighted the importance of youth provision and rural public transport. These comments were endorsed by Councillor M G Baker who suggested that the lack of transport to access services was the greatest form of rural deprivation. He mentioned the contribution made to the lives of those living west of the A1 by the Nene & Ouse Community Transport Scheme and the role that the Council had in continuing to support community transport. Councillor Baker also suggested that the District Council might consider contributing some funding to shops and post offices if this would prevent their closure in villages and in this light drew attention to the efforts made by residents in Catworth to retain the post office in that village.

In terms of affordable housing, Councillor M G Baker questioned the wisdom of the "Right to Buy" policy given the consequences this had had in reducing the public housing stock and particularly welcomed the opportunities presented by the policy on 'rural exception sites' which he considered essential to provide social housing in more rural locations. Although highlighting youth provision as an issue, Councillor Baker accepted that this would be difficult to resolve in rural areas given the requirement to arrange transport to facilities in the towns and the need for adult supervision.

Councillor Mrs B E Boddington referred to the opportunities offered by 'rural exception sites' in villages, applauded the effort that had been made to retain a post office in Eltisley and suggested particularly that ways needed to be found to improve transport services.

Councillor R G Tuplin referred to public support for a campaign to retain a post office in The Giddings which had ultimately been unsuccessful. He contended that the public had been disillusioned by the response but he was now hopeful that the shop would remain in the village which served a vital rural service

Having regard to the comments made by Councillors M G Baker and West in relation to youth provision, Councillor K J Churchill, Executive Councillor for Housing and Public Health encouraged both councillors to contact the Council's Sports and Active Lifestyle Team who organised a programme of activities for young people in rural areas, including school holiday roadshows, specific sports courses and after school sessions. Mention also was made of the DASH project funding for which had been obtained for rural locations.

Councillor P A Swales considered it essential to provide affordable homes for people to be able to continue to live in villages and with this in mind he referred to the Council's planning policies and questioned their ability to be sufficiently flexible to prioritise 'rural exception sites' and promote village facilities such as the recent application for a shop in Pidley which had been refused by the Development Management Panel.

In terms of the rural economy and the effect of isolation issues on business growth, Councillor A Hansard, Executive Councillor for Resources and Policy pointed out that it was vital to identify premises where small businesses could operate, to improve access to broadband and to continue to lobby for investment in transport and improvements to the A14 to maximise opportunities for new and existing business growth. In terms of planning policy, Councillor Hansard also pointed out the opportunities that existed to re-use existing farm buildings. He encouraged Members to continue to support their local post offices and rural outlets given the effect the success of the businesses could have on local supply chains. He further argued that business enterprise was essential to boost the footfall in the market towns and increase and promote the range of leisure, shops and tourism facilities available. Lastly, Councillor Hansard drew attention to the benefits offered to the rural communities by Paxton Pits and the Great Fen and the opportunity to link businesses to both facilities as training establishments.

Following previous comments, Councillor T V Rogers, Executive Councillor for Finance informed Members that the Council tended to direct capital grants to schemes in smaller villages given that it was unlikely that these would benefit from Section 106 funding. He urged County Council colleagues to examine transport issues as County policies, in his view, were not working adequately. Councillor Rogers referred to the availability of rural rate relief for post offices, small shops, petrol stations and public houses and described, in brief, the qualifying criteria for potential claimants. He urged Members to consider their rural settlements and to promote the opportunities available for small businesses to take advantage of rate and hardship relief.

In welcoming the information which had been presented in debate thus far, Councillor P J Downes pointed out that there were inequalities between the villages, some being relatively affluent whilst others struggled and some benefiting from a community spirit and volunteers working in a variety of ways to improve life in the community. He was of the view that there might be opportunities to identify best practice and disseminate this to those communities in greater need. Councillor Downes recognised that funding was an issue and questioned whether the new community infrastructure levy might be used to transfer benefits received via Section 106 Agreements to rural communities. He further endorsed the view that the County Council should look more closely at the provision of rural transport and thanked his colleague Councillors for their useful contributions to the debate.

Referring to Councillor Hansard's address, Councillor Mrs M Banerjee also identified the importance of economic development and tourism for the District and the potential offered by the opportunity to diversify the use of farm buildings. However, she also was concerned at the inflexibility, on occasions, of planning policy to bring improvements to assist the rural economy.

Councillor J A Gray, Executive Councillor for the Environment and IT reported that British Telecom had announced that Huntingdon, St. Ives and Yaxley would soon benefit from superfast broadband, and that in future this would be available to 66% of District residents.

Whilst "cold spots" would still exist, Councillor Gray was hopeful that further discussions with BT would result in greater investment in the District. Mention also was made of projects elsewhere and the actions of a Parish Council in Rutland District which had, under its wellbeing powers, raised funding to improve broadband connections in the village. Councillor Gray urged his colleagues to encourage their respective parish councils to engage with best practice to deliver improvements which would assist rural communities. In endorsing the comments made by Councillors in respect of transport and housing, Councillor Gray also referred to the issue of fuel poverty whereby communities such as Kimbolton did not have access to the natural gas network and had to rely on increasingly costly oil as domestic fuel.

Councillor P D Reeve considered that the lack of late night transport hampered employment opportunities for residents of Ramsey. Furthermore he suggested that support for small business was vital and congratulated the Council for establishing Neighbourhood Forums which could give communities the opportunity to raise their concerns with appropriate agencies. He also commended the work of the Neighbourhood Management Board and was hopeful that all such initiatives would be able to put work positively together to the benefit of Ramsey.

Whilst pleased to support the retention of existing and new shops, public houses and post offices in villages, Councillor P M D Godfrey reminded the Council of the question of sustainability and also queried the flexibility of the planning policy if such ventures were to be encouraged in future.

In endorsing the general thrust of the debate, Councillor M F Shellens pointed out the effect on individuals of living in isolated villages and referred to his personal experience of a resident who had difficulty in travelling for appointments to local hospitals.

Having regard to the series of transport issues raised, Councillor D B Dew, Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport indicated his support for the number of transport initiatives which operated locally, suggested that planning policies adopted locally were largely controlled by national guidance and that 'rural exception sites' were made available if it could be demonstrated that there was a proven local housing need. Regarding the potential to use funding arising from Section 106 Agreements, Councillor Dew reminded the Council that such funds needed to relate to the development from which they had originally derived and that he was hopeful that the new community infrastructure levy might widen the criteria under which such funds might be used.

In closing, Councillor I C Bates, Leader of the Council thanked Councillor K M Baker and those who had contributed to an interesting debate. Furthermore he underlined the opportunities that existed to assist rural villages including grant aid for community schemes and the possibilities offered by 'rural exception sites'. He praised the community spirit which existed in villages and suggested that Parish Councils could facilitate smaller initiatives which might generate self-help, neighbourliness and energise community ethos still further.

**93. OUTCOMES FROM DISTRICT COUNCIL DEBATE ON ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR**

By way of a report by the Head of Environmental and Community Health Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), Councillor K J Churchill, Executive Councillor for Housing and Public Health advised Members of the response by the Huntingdonshire Community Safety Partnership towards the various issues raised during the District Council's debate at its meeting held on 23rd September 2009 on "tackling anti-social behaviour and the fear of crime in Huntingdonshire".

Having regard to the response of partners to each of the matters discussed, the Council

**RESOLVED**

that the actions proposed or currently underway to tackle anti-social behaviour, general disturbance and the fear of crime in Huntingdonshire be noted.

**94. APPOINTMENT OF CABINET MEMBERS**

Further to Minute No. 80 of the meeting of the Council held on 17th February 2010, Councillor K J Churchill, Executive Councillor for Housing and Public Health introduced a report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) regarding interim changes proposed to the formal leadership of the Council in advance of the implementation in May 2011 of more formal executive arrangements necessitated by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

As the changes required various alterations to be made to the Constitution and to the Council Procedure Rules, Members were reminded that the Motion to vary the Rules had stood adjourned without discussion to this meeting following resolution at the previous meeting of the Council in February.

Having regard to the recommendations of the Democratic Structure Working Party and Corporate Governance Panel at its meeting held on 24th March 2010, the Council

**RESOLVED**

that the following Council Procedure Rules be deleted with effect from the annual meeting of the Council in May 2010 -

'1.1 (vii) appoint the Deputy Leader,

'1.1 (viii) agree the number of Members to be appointed to the Cabinet and appoint those Members to the Cabinet;'

and consequential changes made to the constitution where appropriate.

**95. REPORTS OF THE CABINET, PANELS AND COMMITTEE**

**(a) Cabinet**

Councillor I C Bates, Leader and Chairman of the Cabinet presented the Report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 16th and 18th March 2010.

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In connection with Item No. 75 and having regard to the response of the Cabinet to the deliberations of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Wellbeing) on car parking charges, Councillor G S E Thorpe announced that he had presented a petition to the Chief Executive in advance of the meeting which contained over 1,000 signatories opposing car parking charges proposed for the Riverside Park, St. Neots. Councillor Bates replied that the content of the petition would be taken into account when the matter was reconsidered by the Cabinet in June.

On the same subject and in response to representations made by Councillors D Harty, Mrs B E Boddington, R S Farrer, M F Shellens, J S Watt and R J West, Councillor D B Dew, Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport responded that the Off-Street Parking Places Order 2010 had been published for public consultation and that he would encourage all Councillors to submit their comments in response to this exercise when the contents of the petition also would be considered.

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In connection with Item No. 78 and in response to comments from Councillors P G Mitchell and D Harty in respect of the outcome of the study by a Working Group of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Wellbeing) on the development management process, Councillor Bates concurred in the appreciation offered to Members of that Group for the presentation of a well researched and presented report. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, the Report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 16th and 18th March 2010 be received and adopted.

**(b) Standards Committee**

Mr D L Hall presented the Report of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 4th March 2010.

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Whereupon it was,

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 4th March 2010 be received and adopted.

**(c) Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being)**

Councillor J D Ablewhite presented the Report of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Wellbeing) held on 11th March 2010.

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In connection with Item No. 52 and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes, Councillor Ablewhite confirmed that a special meeting of the Panel would be convened to consider the proposed amendments by the Liberal Democrat Group to the 2010/2011 budget once the additional information required to consider the proposals had been collated.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Wellbeing) held on 11th March 2010 be received and adopted.

**(d) Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being)**

Councillor P M D Godfrey presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Wellbeing) held on 2nd and 9th March 2010.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Wellbeing) held on 2nd and 9th March 2010 be received and adopted.

**(e) Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being)**

Councillor S J Criswell presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-being) held on 2nd March and 6th April 2010.

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In connection with Item No. 57 and in response to a question

from Councillor P J Downes, Councillor Criswell concurred that he too was disappointed that the Senior Executive Group at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital had taken a decision on parking arrangements without having taken the Panel's report into account but that he was hopeful that discussions with the Executive Group would continue and progress achieved on car parking and other issues raised by the Panel.

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Referring to Item No. 58, Councillor Criswell reported that arrangements had now been made for training to take place on 3rd June 2010 to assist Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels to scrutinise the work of the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership.

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In connection with Item No. 60, Councillor Criswell announced that the next meeting of the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee would take place on 22nd April and not 13th May 2010.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-being) held on 2nd March and 6th April 2010 be received and adopted.

**(f) Development Management Panel**

Councillor P G Mitchell presented the Report of the meetings of the Development Management Panel held on 22nd February and 15th March 2010.

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In connection with Item No. 25 and in response to a question by Councillor P L E Bucknell regarding the undertaking by the Head of Planning Services to respond formally to Peterborough City Council with the District Council's comments on the proposals for development at Great Haddon, Councillor Bates, Leader of the Council confirmed that the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport had been involved in ongoing discussions on the proposals with the City Council and that should he and the Ward Councillors wish to be advised in greater detail of their progress they should approach the Director of Environmental and Community Services after the meeting.

On the same subject, Councillor Mitchell acknowledged that it would be useful to involve the County Council's education

service in discussions with the City Council given the intention to provide a new secondary school as part of the proposed development.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Development Management Panel held on 22nd February and 15th March 2010 be received and adopted.

**(g) Corporate Governance Panel**

Councillor C J Stephens presented the Report of the meeting of the Corporate Governance Panel held on 24th March 2010.

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In connection with Item No. 21 and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes, regarding the Code of Procurement and the perceived omission of an opportunity to give preference to local suppliers in the event that tenders received were of equal value, Councillor Bates, Leader of the Council undertook to ask the Head of Financial Services to investigate the legality of this suggestion.

Upon being put to the vote, the recommendation contained in Item 21 was declared to be CARRIED.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraphs, the Report of the meeting of the Corporate Governance Panel held on 24th March 2010 be received and adopted.

**96. ORAL QUESTIONS**

In accordance with the Council's Procedure Rules (paragraph 8.3 of the Rules) the Chairman proceeded to conduct a period of oral questions addressed to Executive Councillors and Panel Chairmen as follows:-

**Question from R G Tuplin to the Executive Councillor for Leisure, Councillor Mrs D C Reynolds**

In response to a question regarding the progress of negotiations to secure a service level agreement between Sawtry Community College and Sawtry Leisure Centre, Councillor Mrs Reynolds confirmed that negotiations were continuing between the Headmaster

of the Community College and the General Manager, One Leisure and that the issue had been discussed more widely at the Council's Active Leisure Forum.

**Question from Councillor P D Reeve to the Leader, Councillor I C Bates**

In response to a question regarding the proposed closure of public conveniences in Ramsey, Councillor Bates replied that the questioner would be welcome to attend the meeting of the Cabinet when the report regarding the proposed closures would be considered further.

**Question from Councillor P J Downes to the Executive Councillor for Environment and IT, Councillor J A Gray**

In response to a question regarding the outcome and timescale for progressing issues that had arisen from the Council's debate on reducing the carbon footprint, Councillor Gray replied that a report would be submitted to a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-being).

**Question from Councillor A N Gilbert to the Leader of the Council, Councillor I C Bates**

In response to a question regarding the ponderous procedures for the appointment of Panels and Committees at the Annual Council meeting, Councillor Bates replied that consideration would be given to the methodology for appointments to ensure a more conducive and efficient use of Members' time and resources.

**Question from Councillor Mrs P E Shrapnel to the Leader of the Council, Councillor I C Bates**

In response to a question regarding the number of fixed penalty notices issued by the Council's Dog Warden under the relevant regulations, Councillor Bates replied that he would respond to the questioner in writing with the information requested.

**Question from Councillor P G Mitchell to the Executive Councillor for Operational and Countryside Management, Councillor C R Hyams**

In the absence of Councillor Hyams and in response to a question regarding the future of the financial contribution made to Parish Councils for use of bottle banks given the recent introduction of doorstep glass collections, Councillor Bates replied that the use of bottle banks in mini recycling centres would continue and that parish councils would be consulted as part of any future review of their provision.

**Question from Councillor R J West to the Executive Councillor for Housing and Public Health, Councillor K J Churchill**

In response to a question regarding the level of attendance during the second round of the Neighbourhood Forums, Councillor Churchill thanked Councillor Reeve for his support of the initiative and added that he was pleased to report that attendance at recent forum

meetings was encouraging with 37 attending in St. Neots, 50 in St. Ives, 60 in Huntingdon, 57 in North-West Huntingdonshire and 76 in Ramsey making an overall total of 270 residents and interested parties. The forums had generated interest in a wide variety of community matters and that attendance levels were higher than experienced at the former policing panels.

**Question from Councillor Mrs B E Boddington to the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport, Councillor D B Dew**

In response to a question regarding an update on the proposed widening of the A428 from Caxton Gibbet to the A1 and the impact of additional traffic generated by the Loves Farm development in St. Neots, Councillor Dew assured the questioner that he considered this scheme to be a priority in future infrastructure programmes and that he took every opportunity to raise the issue with partner agencies and at meetings with Cambridgeshire Horizons and South Cambridgeshire District Council.

**97. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972: SECTION 85**

The Chief Executive reported that there were no absences of Members for consideration in accordance with Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972.

The meeting concluded at 9.20pm.

Chairman