**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL – MARCH UPDATE**

In the penultimate meeting of NHDC for the current civic year, the budget for 2017/18 was agreed.  Further savings were identified, as well as a substantial programme of capital expenditure. The council faces challenging times ahead as it has to contend with dwindling revenues from the New Homes Bonus and from Business Rates.

The council's focus is on making North Herts, in all its diversity, a better place for and working.  It aims to do this by working with partners to provide 'an attractive and safe environment for our residents'. Currently, we are working towards a joint waste collection contract with East Herts District Council. Waste collection is not the most glamorous of activities, but it is the biggest item in the expenditure budget, accounting for 45% of the total!

The council has an objective ' To promote sustainable growth within our district to ensure economic and social opportunities exist for our communities...'. The main driver of this is the Local Plan. It also includes a £1m Capital Enhancement Fund, for community halls throughout the District, to be delivered over the next four years.

The third and final objective is to 'deliver cost effective and necessary services to our residents'.  Where these services are charged for at the point of use, such as for planning applications, the fees are also prescribed centrally. However, the council does operate a very successful Careline service. This award-winning service helps elderly and infirm residents to continue living at home. NHDC is also about to launch a building regulations inspection service and hopes that this will be a source of income.

Of course, NHDC does not have a free hand in most of the services it provides. They are so-called 'statutory services', prescribed by the national government. In most cases these are free, for example waste collection. Where charges can be made (e.g. planning applications), the rates are set nationally.

One of the more controversial policies recently has been the one which applies to community halls owned by the council. The policy has been to lease these to local groups on a 'repairing and insuring lease'. This has put some pressure on some local groups who find that it is difficult to adapt to paying for the costs of maintaining their premises. It does, however, put them on an equal footing with groups in parished areas, like Knebworth. Parishes, such as ours, have always had to bear these costs, especially now capital grants for village halls have largely dried up.

So, by now you're probably wondering how much your council tax is going to go up in April. The NHDC precept for a Band D property will be £216.96 next year, an increase of £5, an increase of 2.4% in cash terms, close to zero in real terms. Not great, but as low as was reasonably achieveable in the circumstances.  (The rest of your Council Tax is made up of contributions to the County Council, the Police and the Parish Council.) For other Council Tax Bands, see the NHDC website, or just wait for your bill to be delivered.

Please contact your NHDC councillors if you would like to discuss these or any other matters:

**Steve Hemingway, steve@stevehemingway.com or phone 01438 940594 (please include STD code when dialling)**

**Steve Deakin-Davies, stevedeakindavies@gmail.com or phone 07949 435435**

Or be in touch directly with your County Councillor Richard Thake or your Member of Parliament Stephen McPartland:

* Richard Thake, Herts County Council: richard.thake@hertfordshire.gov.uk, phone 07973 157605
* Stephen McPartland MP: stephen@stephenmcpartland.co.uk, Stephen McPartland MP, House of Commons, Westminster, London, SW1A 0AA