

COUNCIL MEETING held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 12 APRIL 2011 at 7.30 pm

Present:- Councillor S V Schneider – Chairman.
Councillors E C Abrahams, H J Asker, S Barker, E L Bellingham – Smith, C A Cant, R H Chamberlain, R P Chambers, J F Cheetham, R Clover, J E N Davey, A Dean, C D Down, K L Eden, E J Godwin, E W Hicks, S J Howell, J E Hudson, D M Jones, A J Ketteridge, R M Lemon, J E Menell, D Morson, D G Perry, J A Redfern, H S Rolfe, J Salmon, G Sell, C Smith, A D Walters, L A Wells, P A Wilcock and A C Yarwood.

Officers in attendance:- J Mitchell (Chief Executive), M Cox (Democratic Services Officer) R Harborough (Director of Public Services) S Joyce (Assistant Chief Executive – Finance) M Perry (Assistant Chief Executive - Legal) and A Webb (Director of Corporate Services).

C81

MEMBERS' QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

Councillor Cheetham asked the Leader for further details about the New Homes Bonus, the confirmed amount, when it was likely to be received and when and how the council will consult on the allocation of the funds. The Leader replied that the sum of £714,365 was expected this week. The decision on the timescales and mode of consultation would be taken by the new council after the May elections. Councillor Sell welcomed this news and noted that the sum had not been included within the council's budget. He asked whether any thought had been given to the criteria to be used and how the council would deal with any representations received. It was confirmed that criteria had yet to be determined and any representations would be considered by the new council.

Councillor Wilcock mentioned the Government consultation on replacing the 2003 Air Transport White Paper. It appeared to support no new runways in the South East including at Stansted Airport and he asked the Leader when and how the council would respond to the consultation. The Leader replied that he was confident that the council would retain its current stance on the development of Stansted airport. The Director of Public Services said that the current consultation was on the scoping document, the period for responses was extensive (the closing date is 30 September) and there would be plenty of opportunity for the new council to make comments.

Councillor Rolfe asked the Leader to outline the proposed training programme for new councillors. On behalf of the Leader, the Chief Executive replied that all members would be invited to the offices on the Monday after the election to meet the Chief Executive and to sign the Declaration of Acceptance of Office and receive a member pack. There would be an informal session directed more towards the new members on Friday 13 April, with a tour of the offices, photos etc. The following Tuesday there would be more detailed training about the various council functions and decision making. Following the general sessions

there would be a need for training in more specialist areas such as planning and licensing. He also planned a tour of the district and a visit to airside at Stansted Airport. He would be meeting with Councillor Redfern to discuss ways in which existing members could assist with the induction of new members. He would welcome members' suggestions on any particular requirements that they might have.

Councillor Hicks questioned Councillor Rolfe about the purpose and outcome of the recent visit of the Comptroller and Auditor General from the National Audit Office. Councillor Rolfe explained that the visit had discussed the possible regulatory framework that might apply as a result of the Government decision to disband the Audit Commission. This council had been chosen for the visit due to its exemplary finances and was now seen as an example of a good turn around council in respect of financial management.

Councillor Redfern asked Councillor Barker for an update on the proposed timetable for the adoption of the LDF. The meeting was advised that the Environment Committee had agreed to consult on a dwelling provision rate of 295 a year, which meant that new sites would need to be found for 2500 homes to 2027. This would be carried out in June and July. There would be further consultation on options as to where development could take place in the autumn.

C82 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C M Dean, M L Foley, E Gower, J I Loughlin, T P Knight and A M Wattebot.

Members declared the following personal interests:-

Councillor Chambers as a member of Essex County Council.

Councillor Barker as a member of Essex County Council.

Councillor Ketteridge as a member of Saffron Walden Town Council.

Members were sorry to hear that Councillor Gower was currently unwell. The Chairman would send her best wishes for a speedy recovery on behalf of the Council.

C83 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 February 2011 and the extraordinary meeting held on 24 February 2011 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

C84 BUSINESS ARISING

i) Minute C65 - Olympic Working Group

Councillor Cheetham reported that she had attended a very useful presentation from the Essex County Council's Olympic team, this Council's Community

Development Manager and the Museum Curator. The presentation included much useful information, including a timetable that could be passed to the parish councils. She asked that it be circulated to all members and the Chief Executive agreed to provide an appropriate link.

ii) Minute C72 – Property in Saffron Walden

Councillor Wilcock asked about the regular reporting of empty properties that had been requested at the last meeting. Councillor Chamberlain said that this issue had been discussed at the last meeting of Community and Housing Committee and details had been provided. However care had to be taken not to report personal details but summary information would be supplied in the future.

iii) Minute C80 – General Fund budget

Councillor A Dean said that he wished to redress some of the comments made in this minute. He stated that he had never denied that the council had financial problems, his issue was with the degree of the problem and he felt that the action taken in response had been unnecessarily severe. He explained that he had information to show that for successive years the council had experienced unprecedented levels of budget under spend.

An example was the New Homes Bonus which had not been included within budget because the Council had wanted to ensure that it had received the money before it made commitments. This was another case of what he saw as a general trend of under estimated income and over estimated expenditure. He considered this approach to be over cautious and careless.

The Leader replied that it was well known that Councillor A Dean had not accepted the Council's financial problems, in comments made at various meetings and on his personal blog. He considered these to be unacceptable and he had arranged a meeting with the Leader of the Liberal Democrat group to discuss this issue.

C85

CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman reported that her dinner had raised £1,495 and the charity overall had raised £4159. She would shortly be organising a presentation of the cheque to the Guide District Commissioner. She had very much enjoyed her year as Chairman and had attended many dinners and events. Those that were particularly memorable were the Rotary Book awards and the digital launch of Saffron Screen.

She thanked all members for having faith in her and supporting her in her role as Chairman. She thanked all officers, particularly the PA team who had supported her so well. She wished all members who were standing for re election success with their campaigns and to those that were standing down all the very best for the future.

She then passed to Councillor Godwin to make an announcement in respect of the Honorary Alderman, which the Council had already agreed in principle.

Councillor Godwin said that the office on Honorary Alderman was to recognise those members who had given long and exemplary service to the Council. Councillor Abrahams had been a member of the council for 43 years and his service had been both distinguished and dedicated. He was respected in his ward and in the district and he had served his community well. She proposed that Councillor Abrahams be the district council's first Honorary Alderman. This was jointly seconded by Councillors Ketteridge and Wilcock who echoed Councillor Godwin's comments and said that 'Eggy' had been a superb member for the community that he served.

The Chief Executive said that he would arrange for presentation to be made at a council meeting in the new council year.

C86

LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Councillor Ketteridge said that as this was the last meeting of this council term he would like to reflect on where the council had been over the last 4 years and the plans that were in place for the future. In 2007 the council faced serious financial challenges and became infamous as one of three authorities being at risk of financial collapse. This had been a traumatic time for the council and had resulted in the loss of 50 posts. However, by acknowledging the situation, accepting help from Improvement East and by working together, the situation had been turned around and Uttlesford was now a model of good practice for councils facing financial difficulties.

All Local authorities were now facing significant budget cuts. Uttlesford was tasked with saving 2m from the revenue budget over the next 4 years. However it was well placed for the future and had a plan based on 5 work streams that were already making savings. He stressed that the council should continue to focus on its goals and objectives and not be tempted to reckless spending. It was looking to work in partnership at all levels. Services had been devolved to town and parish councils and the work with the West Essex Partnership was expected to produce greater efficiency and financial savings.

Uttlesford had now been recognised as an exemplar of good financial management and was seen as a model of good practise by the DCLG for its work on publishing expenditure details. This had been achieved with a reduced and dedicated management team and with the support of loyal staff. He wished to thank all those that had paid a part in the recovery. In particular he mentioned Adrian Webb, Director of Corporate Services who, for the past 8 months, had provided cover as Clerk to Saffron Walden Town Council. He concluded that over the past 4 years a good working relationship had been developed with the management team and with members and he believed that everyone should be satisfied with what had been achieved.

ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES**i) Local Investment Plan**

The West Essex District Councils Local Investment Plan had been considered at the Council's policy committees and extracts of the relevant minutes were circulated. Councillor A Dean said that the minutes of the policy committees showed very little discussion on this issue. There was a large section about jobs in Harlow and Epping but little of substance relating to Uttlesford and nothing to say about how the council sought to address this. In responding to these remarks Councillor Barker said that this was essentially a bidding document in which the council set out its priorities, for Uttlesford its main priority was the provision of affordable housing. Councillor A Dean hoped that the new council would address seriously the issue of economic development in the district.

RESOLVED that the Local Investment Plan be adopted.

ii) Holloway Crescent Phase 2 Development

The Community and Housing Committee at its meeting on 15 March 2011 had recommended that the council approve the second phase development of 8 affordable housing units at Holloway Crescent, Leaden Roding by using funds from the Stansted Area Housing Partnership and a loan against future rents,

Councillor Barker expressed her thanks to the Divisional Head of Housing and her team for progressing this scheme, 8 new affordable houses would be an asset to the area. Councillor Chamberlain said that for many years the sheltered complex on this site had been very difficult to let and the council should recognise the huge amount of work undertaken to bring this project to its conclusion.

RESOLVED that the council approve the development of 8 affordable housing units at Holloway Crescent, Leaden Roding using up to £445,000 of the Stansted Area Housing Partnership funding and a loan of £438,000 against future rents.

CAR PARKING PARTNERSHIP

Councillor Barker introduced the report on the proposed new car parking arrangements. Members noted that in 2004 on street parking had been decriminalised and had become the responsibility of the County Council. This had been devolved to districts and boroughs with the expectation that it would break even over time. Uttlesford had operated the service in partnership with Colchester and Braintree. However, for each year of operation there had been a deficit and this had been met by Essex County Council. This was unsustainable and notice had been given that from 31 March 2011 the service would be transferred back to ECC.

Essex County Council had considered different ways of providing the service and had decided to establish two partnerships covering the north and the south

of the District, which would each operate through a joint committee with one member from each authority represented. Uttlesford would be in the north partnership administered by Colchester and comprising Braintree, Epping Forest, Harlow and Tending Districts. A business case had been prepared demonstrating how the service could be provided on a break even basis.

Essex County Council had formally offered to enter into a partnership with the authorities concerned for the provision of on street parking enforcement services. It would also delegate to the partnership the power to make and amend traffic regulation orders, to maintain the signs and lines and to set the fees for residents parking permits and on street parking. In addition, the partnership would offer off street parking enforcement to its member authorities. Strategic decisions regarding off street parking enforcement would be taken by a sub-committee of the joint committee as at present. The sub-committee would not have power to set car parking charges for car parks which would remain a function of the individual authorities.

This matter had been considered by the Environment Committee at its meeting on 17 March, which had discussed the various advantages and disadvantages of the proposal. The main advantage was that the council would have a voice at the table and an input into decisions. The Environment Committee had agreed that it would be beneficial for the Council to join the new North Area Partnership.

Councillor Wilcock said he had concerns about the current partnership and the proposed new arrangements did nothing to address these. He was concerned at the lack of parking enforcement in rural locations; there were a number of problems areas where the police had been called to deal with dangerous parking. He questioned whether the service could break even, as the main purpose of parking enforcement should be to prevent dangerous parking, and if this was successful the consequence would be reduced income. In responding to these concerns Councillor Barker said that it was possible to target enforcement to specific problem areas and he should pass the details of the particular sites to the parking manager. She went on to explain how savings were likely to be achieved; by reduction in senior management costs, standardising many of the processes and charges, improving signs and lines and increasing the cost of residents parking permits in districts where the charge was currently very low.

Councillor A Dean understood that the numbers of civil enforcement officers was likely to be increased in the Uttlesford area and asked how this could be achieved without increasing costs. It was explained these appointments would bring the establishment up to the full complement for the area. Councillor Sell added that he was impressed with the service provided by the current enforcement team and hoped that the level of service would not be compromised by the new arrangements.

RESOLVED

- 1 That the council enters into partnership with Essex County Council, Braintree District Council, Colchester District Council, Epping Forest District Council, Harlow District Council and Tending

District Council for the provision of on and off street parking services within those districts and Uttlesford upon the terms set out in the draft agreement and referred to in the report.

- 2 Councillor S Barker be appointed as the council's representative on the joint committee.

C89

NOMINATIONS FOR THE POSTS OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN

Councillor D M Jones was proposed as Chairman of the Council by Councillor Ketteridge and seconded by Councillor Chambers.

Councillor Ketteridge proposed that the appointment of Vice-Chairman be deferred until the Annual meeting of the Council. The group leaders would meet soon after the election to consider nominations for this position.

C90

URGENT BUSINESS

Councillor Abrahams said goodbye to his fellow councillors and wished everyone well for the forthcoming local elections. He said that he had thoroughly enjoyed his time at Uttlesford; he had agreed to stand for 4 years and he was still here 43 years later. He hoped that he had served his community of Clavering well. He thanked Councillors and staff for all the support that they had given him over the years. He wished remaining councillors all success and hoped that they would stand for as long as he did.

Councillor Ketteridge, on behalf of members, thanked Councillor Schneider for all her work over this year and for being such an efficient and entertaining chairman. He wished all members who would not be standing again well for the future. He particularly mentioned Councillor Chamberlain, who prior to being a councillor had worked in the housing department for many years. His knowledge of housing matters had been an asset to the council. For all those seeking re election he wished them well and looked forward to meeting many members again in May.

The meeting ended at 8.35pm