

# **ASSETS OF COMMUNITY VALUE**

## **COUNCIL GARAGES**

### **Law**

Section 87 of the Localism Act 2011 requires the local authority to maintain a list of land in its area that is land of community value, commonly known as its Assets of Community Value.

Under S.88 that includes, but is not restricted to, buildings or land where, in the opinion of the authority, its current main use furthers the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community, and it is realistic to think that such use can continue.

S.90 makes it obligatory for the authority to accept nominations for inclusion on the list if the land nominated is (a) in the authority's area, and (b) is of community value.

### **The Nominations**

On 29 June 2016, Save Our Council Garages validly submitted 11 nominations of buildings and land for inclusion in UDC's Assets of Community Value list. These are all in respect of Council garage sites in Saffron Walden.

The nomination forms set out the grounds for each of them individually to be considered Assets of Community Value.

Inevitably, the 11 nominations have much in common though each is specific and distinct. This submission seeks to address general considerations.

### **Council Garages - Where and Why?**

Council garages exist in the middles of what are or were high-density Council estates. They were built to serve the needs of surrounding residents whose houses could not physically accommodate individual private garages. From the outset, they were available for rent by those who required them and could afford them. That was clearly not going to be every resident, which meant they could be relatively under-provided and thus make maximum use of the available land area.

To be at all useful as garages, they obviously had to be centrally located and accessible to the community they serve, which is why they are where they are.

### **Council Garages - Community Value**

The needs set out above have not changed. Regardless of their ownership now, the houses are still the same size as when they were built and have the same constraints as regards garages. In fact, with increasing car ownership, the need for garaging, of which there is no availability in the private sector, has almost certainly increased. Their existence and availability accordingly benefit the local community not only by providing a useful amenity for those who use them but also the wider community by reducing on-street parking which is usually the only alternative. Both communities' social wellbeing and interests are furthered by them.

As with all garages everywhere, Council garages are used for various purposes, for cars, motorbikes and other transport, and also for storage. All of those are perfectly legitimate uses, none being superior to or more worthy than any other. Whatever they are used for they are clearly providing an amenity that the community needs and considers worth the rent.

And the rent is not cheap. It is currently over £500 a year (£600 including VAT) per garage. That requires some considerable personal justification. Those that are used for storage are clearly not just used casually, but for a serious purpose. Mainly, that means by local tradesmen like painters, plumbers, builders and electricians who desperately need such space to store their materials and equipment. Without such storage, their livelihoods and businesses are threatened, new start-ups are severely hampered, and the local economy suffers, adversely affecting all of us in the community contrary to our social wellbeing and interests.

A Freedom of Information request in May 2016 revealed 291 Council garages in Saffron Walden. Rent received from them in 2015/16 was £120,423. Expenditure on maintenance was just £18,333. The surplus of income over expenditure for the year was thus a very healthy £102,090. They are accordingly a considerable profit-generating asset, the profits going to the Council thereby benefiting the whole community in Uttlesford.

Despite the high annual rent, the overall occupancy rate of the Council garages in Saffron Walden was very high at 83%. 249 individuals, representing 249 families, paid and therefore put a monetary value on the garage they rented of £600 a year. That is a clear numerical indication of the community value they have.

### **Other Assets of Community Value**

Uttlesford District Council currently has some 183 Assets of Community Value listed. Of those, 36 are in Saffron Walden. They range widely from publicly accessible castles, parks and museums to schools, rented allotments, private tennis clubs, private golf courses, a police station, a fire station, an art gallery and several Council-owned car parks. Many of them are not open to the general public, or only accessible on payment of a fee or rent. 11 of the Assets of Community Value in Saffron Walden are owned by UDC.

There are no formal restrictions on what assets can be listed. Council garages offer at least as much in the way of community value as many of the assets currently listed.

### **CONCLUSION**

Council garages have a high community value. They can clearly continue to be used as garages. They therefore meet all the requirements in the Localism Act 2011 to be Assets of Community Value, and should be listed as such as required by law.

### **Save Our Council Garages**

1 Museum Yard, Saffron Walden

\* Save Our Council Garages is a community group of over 70 Uttlesford residents set up to preserve our community assets.