

**PARKING STRATEGY WORKING PARTY held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN on 13 JULY 2000**

Present:- Councillor M A Hibbs - Chairman
Councillors Mrs M A Caton, Mrs D Cornell, R A Merrion,
R J O'Neill and G Sell.

Officers in attendance:- M R Dellow, Mrs T Halford, Mrs S McLagan,
M T Purkiss and A Stewart.

PS1 APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from the Councillors R J Copping and A R Row.

Councillors Mrs D Cornell and M A Hibbs declared their respective interest in so far as they were Members of Saffron Walden Town Council and Councillor G Sell declared an interest in so far as he was a Member of Stansted Mountfitchet Parish Council.

PS2 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 May 2000 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

PS3 BUSINESS ARISING

(i) Minute PS47(i) - Highway Signage

It was reported that Essex County Council had produced details of the new signs and work had provisionally been booked with May Gurney for the project to be carried out later this year.

(ii) Minute PS47(ii) - Fairycroft Car Park - Change Machine

It was reported that Waitrose Limited had now offered to pay half the cost of the replacement change machine in the Fairycroft Car Park. The new machine would be enclosed within a cage when not in use and Waitrose Limited would be responsible for opening and closing the cage.

(iii) Minute PS47(iv) - Resident Parking Scheme - Lining

It was noted that this work had not yet been carried out and Officers undertook to pursue this matter with the County Council.

PS4 DECRIMINALISATION - BRIEFING

Members of the Working Party discussed the decriminalisation issue prior to their meeting with representatives of Essex County Council. Members were particularly concerned at some of the comments which had been attributed to Uttlesford District Council and which did not reflect the Council's position. Councillor Hibbs was congratulated on the way in which he had presented the Council's views at the meeting with Essex County Council and other organisations on 28 March 2000.

Officers reported that Essex County Council had requested a response to the consultation exercise by 18 August 2000.

PS5 SAFFRON WALDEN CAR PARK - USAGE

The Chairman reported that he had received correspondence from the Saffron Walden traders alleging that the use of car parks within Saffron Walden had declined due to the increase in car park charges. However, Officers had produced figures showing the comparative use of car parks between the period April - June 1999 and 2000 which illustrated that there had been an increase in the use of all car parks within Saffron Walden within that period and that the use of Swan Meadow in particular had increased significantly. Officers would advise the Saffron Walden traders of these figures and issue a press release.

PS6 DECRIMINALISATION - JOINT MEETING WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL

The Working Party together with Councillors Mrs C M Dean, P G F Lewis, Mrs J E Menell, D M Miller and G W Powers met with Brian Goodwin and Paul Hardy of Essex County Council and Norman Downey of RTA Associates.

At the outset of the meeting Councillor Hibbs expressed the concern of the Working Party that the Council's position had been misrepresented. He added that the Council's views had been sent in writing to the County Council on 11 April 2000.

Mr Downey gave an overview of a proposed strategy for implementation of decriminalised parking enforcement.

RTA had recommended to the County Council that all districts should be encouraged to decriminalise. As part of this process a package of support would be provided to those authorities taking up this option. He suggested that Districts would be able to retain any surpluses which were made. In order to meet the minimum requirements it was likely that for Uttlesford an extra 2.5 parking attendants would be required and .5 of an admin post would also be necessary.

He claimed that the key benefits to the District Council would be:

- . control over public parking
- . police resources available for other issues
- . addresses declining police involvement
- . reduced illegal parking
- . more opportunities to park on-street
- . increased use of car parks
- . ability to bring in new parking schemes
- . safer environment
- . positions Uttlesford to cope with the future growth of vehicles
- . short-term deficit but long-term financial gain

Mr Downey concluded that decriminalised parking enforcement would be financially viable and that it should be dealt with as an Essex wide issue. He added that there would be considerable merit in a joint approach including benefits from economies of scale etc.

There then followed a question and answer session and in response to a question Mr Goodwin explained that the County Council's policy since 1997 had been to allow District Councils to take on decriminalisation enforcement powers and it would be the District Council's responsibility to make the scheme work. However, the issue was now being looked at on a County wide basis. A report had been commissioned from RTA. This

report had now been approved by the County Council for consultation purposes. Mr Goodwin added that the County Council did not want an answer at this stage as to whether a District Council wished to take on decriminalisation enforcement powers but was merely looking for comments on the report. He considered that decriminalisation was a viable proposition and would provide a surplus overall. The County Council's Executive Board would make a decision on the proposal at its meeting on 25 September.

Some concern was expressed that a consultation period during August did not make it possible for all Members to be involved in making a response due to the holiday period and that more time should be allowed. Mr Goodwin confirmed that any late representations could be reported orally to the meeting on 25 September.

A number of Members expressed concern at the financial implications of the scheme, particularly in the short term. It would be difficult for the Council to commit itself to making a deficit, particularly having regard to the current budgetary situation. It was also suggested that the model did not take account of charging for on-street parking and there was some concern that the County Council would force the District Council to introduce this in order to balance the books. Mr Goodwin confirmed that the initial set-up costs would be funded by the County Council and recovered by way of a levy. The County Council wanted a sustainable transport policy which encouraged people to shop locally and would not require the District Council to introduce on-street charges. Any deficits would be funded from surpluses on the overall locally determined programme.

A Member also pointed out that there was no guarantee from the County Council about how the scheme would operate in future years. Whilst Mr Goodwin accepted this point he suggested that the District Council could include in its response a requirement for a ten year guarantee. He also stated that as part of the process the County Council would look at extending agency powers to District Councils to enable them to make and amend orders.

The Chairman thanked Messrs Downey, Goodwin & Hardy for attending the meeting and answering Members' questions.

PS7 DECRIMINALISATION - DE-BRIEFING

Following the meeting with the County Council the Working Party met to give further consideration to the issue of decriminalisation.

Members were still concerned at the financial viability of the scheme and whilst accepting that it might be appropriate in some urban areas Members were not convinced that it was appropriate for a large rural district such as Uttlesford.

It was also considered that the response to the County Council should state that there were a number of serious concerns about the introduction of the scheme in Uttlesford and the Council is not able to consider the principle of the introduction of decriminalised parking enforcement until it obtained reassurances on a number of specific issues including deficits and guarantees.

The matter would be discussed at the next meeting of the Working Party.

PS8 NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the next meeting would be held at 6.00am on 1 August 2000 and that the four Essex County Councillors for Uttlesford would be invited to attend the first part of the meeting.

The meeting ended at 8.15pm