

**COMMUNITY COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES GREAT DUNMOW
at 7.30 pm on 18 JANUARY 2007**

Present:- Councillor D J Morson – Chairman.
Councillors M A Gayler, R M Lemon, A Marchant, J E Menell, M
J Miller and F E Silver.

Tenant Forum Representatives:- Mr P Simpson and Mrs J Bolvig-Hanson.

Also present:- Councillors S Flack and D W Gregory.

Officers in attendance:- D Burridge, S Clarke, M Cox, R Goody, P O'Dell,
D Osborne, A Stewart, R Millership, L Petrie, R Smith, J Snares
and S Walker.

C46 STATEMENT BY MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC

Mr Tredget, Chairman of High Roding Parish Council spoke to the Committee about the land at Broadfield, High Roding that had been identified as a possible site for development. He said that this land was currently used for parking and was a valuable amenity for the estate which lacked sufficient parking spaces, was very congested with cars often parked on the pavement. The plot was too small and in the wrong location for a new building. It was more valuable for the village and the parish council would very much like to acquire the land and make it suitable for parking.

C47 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E W Hicks, J P Murphy and S V Schneider.

C48 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2006 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

C49 BUSINESS ARISING

(i) Minute C35 Business arising

It was confirmed that action was being taken in respect of the two empty homes in Stansted.

C50 OLYMPIC TASK GROUP

It was noted that this item had been withdrawn and would be considered at a meeting of full Council.

C51

HOUSING POLICY UPDATE

The Committee was advised of progress made on housing policy issues and in particular the four sites identified for affordable housing.

Councillor Hibbs had visited Broadfield, High Roding and confirmed that there was no specific recommendation in respect of the site. He said that the Council was looking at all land in its ownership for possible social housing but it appeared that this site was more important for the use of the residents of Broadfield. Councillor Flack added that most houses on the estate had two vehicles but only one parking space and there was strength of feeling amongst the local community that the land should be retained for parking. She hoped that the land could be transferred to the parish council. All the Rodings parishes were currently undertaking a survey of housing need.

Officers had agreed a proposed development plan for Broomfields in association with Swan Housing Association for 6 affordable homes for let. At Reynolds Court, a programme of upgrading had been put forward.

In relation to Waldgroves, Great Dunmow, Councillor Gayler hoped that it might be possible to provide open space/play amenity at the corner of the site where it joined the Estuary Housing development. He said there was a great need for open space in this area and it could be provided at this site without affecting the proposed housing development.

RESOLVED that

1. Progress is noted by the Committee.
2. The site plan for Broomfields, Hatfield Heath is agreed and planning permission is sought.
3. No further action is taken in respect of development at Broadfield, High Roding, officers to investigate other uses for the land.
4. Officers be asked to pursue the provision of an area of open space, at the corner of the Waldgroves/Estuary site in association with Estuary Housing.
5. The proposed works to upgrade Reynolds Court be agreed.

C52

DAY CENTRE AT VICARAGE MEAD THAXTED

The Committee was asked to approve additional expenditure of £100,000 for the construction of the new day centre at Thaxted, following a request from the East Area Panel to include environmental and sustainable measures. These included improved build construction to reduce U-Values, and environmental measures including wind turbine, heat pump and solar heating.

Councillor Menell questioned the £20,000 for consultants' fees and asked why the work could not be undertaken in house. The Senior Architectural Surveyor

said that the Council did not employ a quality chartered surveyor or structural engineers, and there was not currently a mechanical or electrical engineer in post. The Energy Efficiency Officer had been very involved with the project but did not have the experience for the technical implementation. This was a new area and at the moment help was needed from companies with experience of the new technologies. However the whole department had learnt a lot from this exercise and would expect to require less outside assistance for future developments.

In answer to a further question, officers confirmed that Government grants of up to 50% were available for the environmental measures.

Members supported this scheme, as an innovative project which showed that the Council was committed to providing environmental measures in its own buildings.

RECOMMENDED to Operations Committee that the Committee approve additional expenditure of £100,000 in line with the request from the East Area Panel for the provision of a new day centre in Thaxted as outlined in the report for the following points.

- i) improved build construction to reduce U-Values (£30,000)
- ii) Environmental measures (wind turbine, heat pump, solar heating)(£50,000) – offset against grants by estimate 50%
- iii) Consultants fees (£20,000)

It was further RESOLVED that officers actively pursue obtaining the relevant grants.

C53

EVERY CHILD MATTERS

The Community and Development Manager gave details of the Every Child Matters agenda in relation to district councils. A National Service Framework was to be produced which was a 10 year programme aimed at stimulating long term and sustained improvement in children's health. It set out the expectations of the Government and what it considered to be best practice in relation to a number of standards. An action plan had been prepared based on the standards that applied to the district. It had been prepared with the Uttlesford District Children and Young Peoples Partnership. He said that this partnership was already very well developed and in many cases the action plan endorsed the work that was already being carried out.

Councillor Menell asked that the word "and members" be added to point 5.5 in relation to CRB checking. Councillor Hibbs referred to the change in the way that the County Council would be delivering the youth service and issues previously covered would need to be brought to a different forum. He wondered if the Council's Youth Initiatives Group could take this role. Councillor Menell asked if a representative of the Youth Service could address a future meeting to outline these changes.

RESOLVED that the Action ^{Page 3} Plan be endorsed.

C54

HOUSING STRATEGY WORKING GROUP

The Committee received the minutes of the Housing Strategy Working Group held on 28 November 2006.

At Minute HS2, the Chairman said that he had recently visited Vicarage Mead and had been delighted at the quality of the work. These flats were now very popular. He commented that the work had been undertaken while some residents had still been living there with a minimum of disruption. He paid credit to all the officers involved and to the Council for the decision to do the scheme itself.

He then drew attention to the amount of adaptation work being carried out and the impact that this would have on the future programme.

At Minute HS4, Councillor Hibbs said that the meetings of the Community Committee had become overly long and focused more on housing issues, many of which were low level decision items. This meant that other items did not always get a fair hearing and there was not time to discuss the housing issues in sufficient detail. He suggested a solution would be to rename the existing Housing Strategy Working Group, the "Housing Board", that it should meet more regularly and be given certain delegated powers. He asked officers to prepare a report on this basis for the next meeting of Full Council.

Mrs Bolvig Hanson was concerned that the Board would be a more formal meeting and might reduce the input of the Tenant Forum representatives. Councillor Hibbs agreed that the status of the tenants in respect of the meetings should be reviewed.

Members asked for a report on the new structure of the housing department.

RESOLVED that the Committee approve the recommendations set out in Minutes HS2 – Capital and Revenue Programme 2006/07 and 2007/08 and Minute HS3 – Review of HRA business plan.

In relation to the recommendation in Minute HS4 it was

RECOMMENDED to Full Council that the Housing Strategy Working Group be renamed the Housing Board and given decision making powers. It should have a minimum of 5 meetings per committee year with additional meetings for rent setting and the housing strategy when required. Officers be asked to prepare a report to Council setting out proposed powers and responsibilities of the Board

C55

CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2007/08 – 2009/10

The Director of Resources presented details of the Draft General Fund Capital Programme for the Committee and the Housing Revenue Account Draft Capital Programme.

He explained the schemes in the 2007/08 programme and said that these could be funded, but drew attention to the yearly reduction in the amount of capital receipts, a situation that would need to be looked at.

RESOLVED that Members recommend to Operations Committee the proposed revised capital budget for 2006/07 together with the proposed capital budgets for 2007/08, 2008/9 and 2009/10 for the General Fund and 2007/08 and 2008/09 for the Housing Revenue Account, subject to the availability of capital resources and prioritisation of the entire Capital Programme by Operations Committee.

C56

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT AND RENT LEVELS 2007/08

The Director of Resources introduced Peter Clanchy, who was a HRA specialist and had helped in the preparation of these accounts. The report set out the 2007/08 draft estimates for the Housing Revenue account. It was explained that the amount of rent incorporated into the estimates were based on rent levels which were determined by formulae set out by Central Government.

Officers had met with the Tenant's Forum earlier in the week to explain the figures. At that time it had appeared that there had been a significant increase in the central charges, but it had later been found that there was an error in these figures. Revised figures were circulated but the rent levels were not affected. The central recharges in respect of this committee would be reviewed with the housing staff and a workshop would be held for Members in the summer. Councillor Gayler was pleased that this was to take place so as to reflect actual expenditure and be fair to both tenants and tax payers.

Members expressed concern at the Government's policy for the calculation of rent levels which resulted in above inflation increases for tenants. Mrs Bolvig Hansen said that it was rural authorities that were hardest hit and suggested that officers contact other authorities in a similar situation to share experiences. The Chairman said he would be meeting Sir Alan Haselhurst MP on 16 May and would raise this with him then.

Councillor Hibbs hoped that the Council would endeavour to work within the constraints of the system and fund housing so that a good standard of service could be provided and the housing stock maintained to its current level. He confirmed that at this time no stock transfer was being considered and said that tenants should be fully aware of this. He said that the Council should try and ensure that all its financial skills were working more closely together and to that end it was essential that an HRA accountant was appointed as soon as possible.

RESOLVED that the Committee

1 accepts the draft estimates presented for 2007/2008 and confirm that

i) the weekly dwelling rents increase by an average of 5%, in line with the Government's proposals.

ii) garage rents increase from £7.20 to £7.40 per week (2.8%) and that heating and sewerage charges are increased by 2.5%

iii) Supporting People charges are increased from April 2007 in accordance with the contract with the Commissioning Body, and that protection be increased against the warden service charge for all those tenants at 31 March 2003 who are ineligible for Supporting People grant assistance.

- 2 officers urgently review action that can be taken to make the appointment of an HRA accountant,
- 3 Representation be made on behalf of the Full Council to express strong disapproval of the negative subsidy scheme.

C57

GENERAL FUND BUDGET 2007/08

The Committee received a report which provided the basis for finalisation of the Committee's General Fund budget for 2007/08 subject to final considerations by the Operations Committee and Full Council. It contained full details of the base budget, prepared on the basis of current levels of service provision, a refined list of spending pressures previously considered, and proposals to achieve the budget reductions required following guidance issued by the Operations Committee.

The Committee was informed that this year the consultation on the budget had involved sending questionnaires to all Parish councils asking for comments on specific areas of spending. The results of this were reported.

The report also proposed the devolution of 5 of the committee budgets to Area Panels, although the detail of this was still to be worked out.

RESOLVED that the Committee approves and submits to the Operations Committee

- 1 the revised base budget for 2006/07 and the draft base budget for 2007/08.
- 2 The spending pressures put forward, including one-offs.
- 3 the proposed savings identified in the report.
- 4 the 5 areas of budget devolution to the Area Panels.

C58

CHOICE BASED LETTINGS

Members recalled that at the meeting in September 2006 the Committee had decided not to proceed with the implementation of a Choice Based Letting Scheme through a sub regional consortium as there were a number of areas of concern. Officers had been asked to investigate a scheme particular for Uttlesford. In doing so they had been visited by the relevant Government

officer, and had been asked to bring back a report to see if the Committee would reconsider its decision. Officers had had assurances that the issues of concern would be overcome and that Uttlesford could now rejoin the scheme.

RESOLVED that

- 1 Council Procedure rule 12.1 be suspended to enable the Committee to rescind a decision made within the last 6 months.
- 2 Officers be authorised to rejoin the consortium and implement Choice Based Lettings in the district before the Government deadline of 2010.

C59 **TENANTS FORUM MINUTES**

The Committee considered the Minutes of the meetings of the Tenant Forum held on 13 November 2006.

Mrs Bolvig–Hansen said that the Forum had been disappointed by the Police proposals for community policing in this area. Alex Stewart would take the comments back to the Police.

There had also been concern about the proposal to turn off the street lights during night time hours and that there had been no consultation with tenants.

RESOLVED that officers write to County Councillor Bass expressing concern that tenants had not been consulted on the proposal to turn off street lights during night time hours.

C60 **HOMELESS TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION**

The Senior Housing Officer explained that there were 34 homeless families in temporary accommodation, mainly hard to let elderly person's bungalows in the more remote parishes. Due to the demand for social housing some people tended to spend prolonged periods in the units and during this time become settled in the local community. It was proposed to offer 14 of these properties to the tenants as secure accommodation. The landlord of the 3 RSL properties would also be asked to convert these.

RESOLVED that the Committee agrees

- 1 to convert a limited number of units of temporary accommodation into permanent tenancies within the Council's own stock.
- 2 To consult with the involved RSL to convert a number of their current temporary tenancies (Assured short hold tenancies) to Permanent Assured Tenancies.

C61 **HOMELESSNESS STATISTICS**

The Committee received the homelessness figures for the period 1 to 30 April 2006

C62 **HERITAGE BUS ROUTE**

Councillor Gregory outlined a proposal for a tourist bus route in the district operated by Blue Triangle. The service could operate Sundays between the end of May and the end of September. It was hoped that it could become a first class tourist attraction benefiting both local residents who want a day out, visitors to Uttlesford, and the enthusiast market.

Blue Triangle had been looking at possible timetables and at the moment were suggesting a servicing route from Epping to Gt Dunmow via Harlow and Hatfield Heath (3 journeys), a (single deck) journey from Chelmsford to Saffron Walden via Dunmow, Tilty and Thaxted, a (double deck) route from Gt Dunmow to Audley End House via Thaxted, Saffron Walden, Littlebury, and Audley End Station (6 journeys) and a (single deck) journey between Saffron Walden and Gt Dunmow via Radwinter, Finchingfield, Gt Bardfield and Bran End Stebbing. It was proposed that fares would be charged.

In order to make the event successful it would be very important for there to be sufficient publicity. It was estimated that the costs to run the scheme would be between 19 – 24K. Income from the service would need to be between £200-£500 per day and Blue Triangle was prepared to accept this risk subject to subsidy. It was hoped that ECC or other partners might be found to assist with the funding.

Councillor Gregory hoped that the Committee would support the scheme so that the next meeting of the Tourist Forum could start to put together a possible package.

RESOLVED that the Committee support, in principle, the proposal for the Heritage Bus route and officers assist in seeking external funding.

C63 **COMMUNITY ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS**

The Chairman agreed to the consideration of this item as a decision was required before the next meeting of the Committee.

The Committee received the Minutes of the Community Achievement Awards Panel held on 26 October 2006

RESOLVED that the Committee endorse the nominations for the Community Achievement Awards

The meeting ended at 9.40 pm.