

**COMMUNITY COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 15 MARCH 2007**

Present:- Councillor D J Morson – Chairman.
Councillors H D Baker, P Boland, M A Gayler, M A Hibbs,
R M Lemon, A Marchant, J E Menell, J P Murphy,
S V Schneider and G Sell.

Tenant Forum Representatives:- Mrs D Cornell and Mrs J Bolvig-Hanson.

Officers in attendance:- D Burridge, S Clarke, M Cox, P O'Dell, H Joy,
R Millership, J Mitchell, L Petrie and S Walker.

C64

STATEMENT BY MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC

Gail Skilling, Chairman of Ashdon Parish Council addressed the meeting about the Parish Council's request to lease land from the District Council for use as play space. There was currently no play space at the top end of the village, and although the new affordable housing development would provide some play space for younger children, there was nothing for the older children and teenagers. The proposed site was adjacent to the affordable housing development and could be accessed by a footway between the landscape bund and the houses and it would therefore not be necessary to access the site by the private road. There were potentially four parking spaces near to the proposed footway and at a nearby car park. However, it was unlikely that many children would be driven to the area as it was within a 2 minute walk from 95 houses.

Mrs Skilling said that the land in question was an exception site for affordable housing, but the village already had 46 affordable/social properties which equated to 22% of the housing stock. There wasn't currently a need for more affordable housing, so the parish council was asking for a lease of at least 25 years so that the land could be used for the benefit of the community. She said that the use of the site in this way would be in accordance with District Council policies for the provision of open space.

C65

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E W Hicks, M J Miller and F E Silver.

Councillor Sell declared a personal interest in agenda item 7 as his mother was a member of the Stansted Day Centre Management Committee.

Councillor Lemon declared a personal interest as a member of Hatfield Heath Parish Council and Councillor Marchant declared an interest as a member of Stansted Parish Council.

C66 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2007 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

C67 **BUSINESS ARISING**

(i) Minute C54 – Housing Strategy Working Group

The Committee was informed that the proposal for a Housing Board would be considered at the meeting of Full Council on 17 April 2007.

C68 **HOUSING POLICY – LAND AT ASHDON**

The Committee considered a proposal from Ashdon Parish Council to lease land from the Council for the provision of a recreational area. The land to the west of All Saints Close was currently a Council asset which could be used in the future as a rural exception site for affordable housing. Ashdon had received a high number of affordable housing units during the last 15 years and housing need locally was currently low.

Officers had been concerned about the proposed access arrangements and parking provision, but further information had been provided by the chairman of the parish council at the start of the meeting and would require further investigation by officers. The report had concluded that at this time it would not appropriate to lease the land to the Parish Council.

Councillor Savage, the local member, said that this was a difficult decision but the village had been the leading provider of affordable housing and there was now a need to provide somewhere for the over 10's to play. He thought that the parish council might be able to compromise on the length of the lease, but it needed to be a sufficient length of time to make the investment worthwhile.

The Director of Development said that the affordable housing developments in Ashdon had occurred because there had been District council owned land within the village. With regard to the use of the land for recreation, a change of use application would probably be required, although the details of how the land would be used were still unclear. He added that the provision of affordable housing was a key part of the Council's corporate plan.

Some members pointed out the significant need for affordable housing in the district, whilst others had sympathy for the Parish Council and the need to provide this facility in the community. The committee felt there could be some compromise arrangement, where the land could be leased to the parish council, without ruling out the use of the land for housing if there was an identifiable need in the parish

RESOLVED that

- 1 the Committee is sympathetic to the request of Ashdon Parish Council but further negotiations are required on the exact terms

of how the land will be used and the leasing arrangements for the medium term and the understanding that the future use of the land for housing should not be ruled out.

- 2 A further report be made to the committee before the end of the year.

C69

MUSEUM SERVICE: HERITAGE QUEST CENTRE AND HERITAGE LOTTERY FUND

The Committee was given details of the proposed application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for the Heritage Quest Centre Project. It was planned to apply in June 2007 for 72.5% of the project costs. The Council was being asked to agree a capital contribution spread over the three years of the project totalling £150,000, in order to secure HLF support. Other matched funding was in place, and the Heritage Quest Trust would be applying for landfill tax grants concurrent with the application to the HLF. The decision from the HLF would take a minimum of 6 months, so approval at this stage did not commit the Council irreversibly, as the project would depend on the HLF's decision. However, progressing the application at this stage would maximise chances of obtaining HLF funding while retaining grants already offered as matched funding within a reasonable timescale.

Members accepted that this was a worthwhile project but expressed concern at the increased demand on reserves. Also, the contribution had increased by £60,000 and there were a number of uncertain projections as to possible income. Also, if the project overran the Council might be committed to additional spending.

The Director of Resources said that £60,000 was already in the Capital Programme, the additional £90,000 would have to be financed by external borrowing which would equate to a revenue implication of about £8000 per annum. The Museum Creator said that a 10% contingency had been built into the project cost and confirmed that £150K would be the maximum contribution from the Council. Considerable effort was being made to secure matched funding.

The Chairman said that he had been involved with the Museum since 1995. It had an outstanding set of officers who had worked incredibly hard to formulate this bid. The financial commitment of the council would give a chance to provide something worthwhile in the district. He reiterated that no money would be spent unless the Lottery bid was successful

RECOMMENDED to the Operations Committee that

- 1 officers prepare and submit a formal application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the Heritage Quest Centre Project,
- 2 Capital funding totalling £150,000 is committed to the project over a three year period: £60,000 in 2007/08; £50,000 in 2008/09 and £40,000 in 2009/10.

C70 **TENANT FORUM MINUTES**

The Committee received the minutes of the Tenant Forum held on 29 January 2007.

The Tenant Forum representatives said that they had been very disappointed that they had not been informed about the changes to the structure of the Housing section. The housing officers were the forum's only link with the Council and major changes were unsettling. The Chief Executive had attended the last meeting of the Forum and explained the situation. Councillor Hibbs was pleased that at that meeting the Chief Executive had confirmed that stock transfer was not being considered by the Council.

C71 **HOUSING POLICY AND LAND DISPOSAL**

Members were advised of the current position relating to sites in Hatfield Heath and Birchanger. Officers have been working in partnership with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) for a scheme for the land at Broomfields in Hatfield Heath. In order to make the scheme more affordable and enable officers to negotiate nomination rights, it was proposed that the land be transferred at nil or affordable housing value to the preferred RSL. This would equate to the Council's contribution to the scheme.

Officers had also discussed the feasibility of using sites at Birchwood in Birchanger with RSL partners for social housing. However RSLs were not usually in favour of developing such small sites due to the high costs involved and this was the case for these sites. Therefore, officers were seeking agreement to sell these sites for private development.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the site at Broomfields be transferred to a RSL at nil or affordable housing value for the development of affordable housing for rent subject to planning consent and successful Housing Corporation bid for funding.
- 2 the two smaller sites at Birchwood be sold on the open market subject to planning consent, subject to a guideline price specified by the District Valuer and in accordance with the Council's Standing Orders

C72 **STANSTED DAY CENTRE**

This Committee considered a request from the Management Committee of the Stansted Day Centre to employ a manager who would be responsible for the day-to-day running of the centre. The current Management Committee had run the service 20 years and this had resulted in low expenditure to the Council. It employed 2 cooks, arranged volunteer rotas and managed all the fundraising activities. However, members of the Committee were getting older and there was few new volunteers coming forward. The current

volunteers were still happy to be involved with the Day Centre but wanted to ensure its future by employing a general manager to undertake the majority of the work that they had been undertaking.

It was proposed to permit the Day Centre to retain a 50% share of the rental income, which currently amounted to approximately £1,600 per annum. The Management Committee would utilise the rental income along with some of its reserves to employ a manager who would take on the day to day running of the centre and undertake some fundraising activities.

Members considered this to be a positive way forward and noted that the scheme would be reviewed in 18 months.

RESOLVED that

- 1 The day centre retains the Council's 50% share of rental income of approx £1,600, officers to investigate the funding of this from existing budgets;
- 2 Officers undertake a review of the pilot project after 18 months of operation and report the findings to the Committee

C73

REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES

Members received details of the revised fees and charges for services covered by the committee. Members noted that the services operated on a commercial basis (excluding those that offered at a concessionary rate) and the charges needed to reflect this. Councillor Hibbs asked that the charges for Health Certificate for export and Border Inspection Post be increased in line with inflation. Also members felt that the charges for stray dogs were relatively low. There was a fixed statutory fee but it was requested that the council fee be raised.

RESOLVED that the schedule of fees and charges for 2007/08 be approved with the following amendments

- Health Certificate for export £53
- Border Inspection certificate £155
- The Council fee for stray dogs £35

The meeting ended at 9.40 pm.