

**COMMUNITY COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD  
SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 PM on 6 SEPTEMBER 2007**

Present:- Councillor S V Schneider – Chairman.  
Councillors E C Abrahams, E L Bellingham-Smith,  
R Chamberlain, E W Hicks, S J Howell, J E Hudson, J E Menell,  
D J Morson, J A Redfern, G Sell and C C Smith.

Also present:- Councillor A J Ketteridge.

Tenant Forum Representative:- Mrs D Cornell.

Officers in attendance:- G Bradley, D Burrige, S Clark, M Cox,  
R Millership, A Stewart and S Walker.

**C12 STATEMENT BY MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC**

Gail Skillings from Ashdon Parish Council updated the Committee on its request to lease council owned land for a recreational play area. The Parish Council had met with officers and a solution had now been agreed. Officers had recommended a reduced lease period, which was acceptable but the Parish Council was concerned at the frequency of the review. She said that would need to invest a considerable amount in the land in terms of time and money in applying for planning permission and preparing the land as a recreational area. She asked for a longer lease period to reflect this.

**C13 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M J Miller, D J Sadler and A C Yarwood.

**C14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Menell declared a personal interest as Chairman of the Buffy Bus Association. Councillor Ketteridge declared a personal interest in item 5 as a member of Saffron Walden Town Council.

**C15 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21 June 2007 were agreed as a correct record subject to an amendment to Minute C5, paragraph 2, fourth line to read "Councillor Chamberlain thought that the Organisational Re-engineering report should be considered by this Committee and the Committee Members concurred".

**C16 BUSINESS ARISING**

(i) **Minute C5 – Lead Officer's Report**

Councillor Chamberlain expressed his disappointment that the Organisational Re-engineering report for the Housing Service would not be considered by the Community Committee. He asked that these comments be forwarded to the Senior Management Team.

(ii) **C11 (d) – Flooding at Ashdon**

It was reported that the Environment Committee had recently agreed to fund the survey work in relation to flooding. Councillor Morson said that he had hoped that the Emergency Planning Officer might be available to answer questions about current flooding measures in the District. He wanted to know what arrangements were in place to aid parishes to deal with potential flooding.

**C17 HOUSING POLICY – LAND AT ASHDON**

*The Committee agreed to the consideration of the following item on the grounds of urgency as a decision was required before the next meeting of the Committee.*

The Committee recalled that Ashdon Parish Council had requested that a piece of land owned by Uttlesford District Council could be leased for play space for a 50 year period. The proposal had been considered by the last meeting of the Committee and Members had asked that the Parish Council and officers discuss the proposal before bringing a further report to Committee. Meetings had been held and it was now proposed that the land be leased to the Parish Council for ten years with a break clause after five years and then every year after that.

Councillor Chamberlain said that he was pleased that discussions had taken place and an agreement was now emerging. The Parish Council had now come up with a more modest request for a 10 year lease. However, it would take a number of years to get the facility up and running and he suggested a two year extension to this lease period. The Committee agreed with this approach.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the land is leased to the Parish Council for an initial period of 12 years with a break clause after seven years in accordance with the principles outlined by Ashdon Parish Council;
- 2 the land be used as open space for free play.

**C18 LEAD OFFICER'S REPORT**

The Director of Operations updated the Committee on matters arising from the Minutes that were not otherwise on the agenda and information items arising since the last meeting of the Committee.

In answer to a question, it was confirmed that the development at Manor Road, Stansted was likely to be built within 18 months to two years if the bid for funding was forthcoming.

Members expressed concern at the increasing costs of the Day Centre building at Thaxted. Although the Committee had asked for sustainable measures to be included within the design, they were also keen for the building work to commence and were aware that it should be provided within a practical price. The Director of Operations said that officers were currently working with the lowest tenderers to find ways of reducing the costs and would come back to the Committee with further information as soon as possible. Councillor Menell asked whether any grants had been applied for in respect of this building and officers agreed to look into this.

## **C19 SAFFRON WALDEN SKATE PARK LAND ADJOINING PEASLANDS ROAD**

The Committee was informed that the land on which the Lord Butler Fitness and Leisure Centre and Turpin's Indoor Bowls Club was situated had been transferred to the District Council for the construction of the Leisure Centre. In 2001, some of that land had been leased to Saffron Walden Town Council for the construction of the skate park. This had been completed in July 2007; and it was now proposed to install a path to provide access to the site. The Town Council considered that it would be less complicated for the whole of the grassed open area to be leased to the Town Council. This would enable it to maintain the land and also install children's play equipment. Members agreed that this was a sensible solution.

RESOLVED that the Committee approve the request from Saffron Walden Town Council to add to the area of land shown hatched red on the plan attached to Appendix 1 into the existing skate park lease to the Saffron Walden Town Council subject to

- 1 the existing covenant for the open space land to be used for sporting purposes to be retained, but widened to include recreational purposes;
- 2 no permanent structures be constructed alongside the Leisure Centre and Turpin's Indoor Bowls Club that would preclude development of either of these buildings in the future;
- 3 the provisions of the existing lease be applied to this area of land, ie term of 99 years at a peppercorn rent per annum and a break clause in the year 2034.

## **C20 CONTRIBUTION FUND SCHEME GRANT AND OTHER GRANT REQUESTS**

*Councillor Howell declared a personal interest as a friend of Thaxted Festival and a representative on Uttlesford Citizens Advice Bureau.*

The Committee was given details of the grants made from the Contribution Fund Scheme, these were given to voluntary organisations in recognition of the services that they offered which the Council might otherwise have to provide. Grants were currently given to the Uttlesford Citizens Advice Bureau, Bishops Stortford CAB, The Council for Voluntary Services and Uttlesford Community Travel.

These organisations had now asked for a further three years funding and it was noted that these requests exceeded the current budget allocation. The Strategic Partnerships Manager had prepared a table which set out the existing grant allocations, the amount requested and also a column showing the amount of grant if a 3% per annum increase was applied to the existing grant, plus inflation for the next three years. All the organisations would continue to have a service level agreement with the Council.

The Committee was asked to consider a range of options in response to these requests:-

- (a) cease funding the Contribution Fund scheme;
- (b) provide funding solely for the next financial year with a built in review for future funding in September 2008;
- (c) provide funding for the next three years at the same level as is currently being received;
- (d) consider increasing the levels of funding as requested by the organisation; and
- (e) provide funding at the current levels received but with an inflationary uplift over the next three years.

The Committee was also asked to consider requests for funding from the Thaxted Music Festival and the Great Dunmow Maltings Preservation Trust.

Members said that it was important that the organisations received funding for three years to enable them to carry out effective planning. It was agreed that all of the organisations carried out excellent work and were essential to Uttlesford. However, Members understood the current financial position and felt that the Council should only commit to providing funding at the current levels received, with an inflationary uplift over the next three years.

RESOLVED that the Committee recommends that

- 1 grant allocations for the Contribution Fund Scheme be considered for the setting of draft budgets for 2008/09 with option (e) being Members preferred option;
- 2 funding for the Thaxted Festival of £3,500 per annum for the next three years be including in the setting of the draft budgets;
- 3 the request by Dunmow Maltings for a £1,000 annual grant contribution for three years towards the day to day running costs be considered in the setting of the draft budgets.

C21

## **HOUSING POLICY – DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

The Committee was updated on the progress of the proposed developments on council owned sites. At the last meeting, officers had been asked to consult with Great Dunmow Town Council regarding the site at Waldgrooms as it had been suggested that play facilities were needed in this area. The Housing Association and the Town Council had confirmed that the land was not needed for this purpose and Members were now asked to agree its use for affordable housing. Councillor Smith said that he disagreed with the Town Council's view as there were no play facilities in the vicinity of Waldgrooms. Councillor Chamberlain confirmed that it was council policy to use this particular site for affordable housing.

Officers had also put forward a further proposal for affordable housing at Coney Acre, Rickling which would provide three, two bedroom bungalows.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the progress be noted by the Committee;
- 2 the site plans for Coney Acre, Rickling and Waldgrooms, Great Dunmow be agreed and planning permission be sought.

C22

## **TENANT FORUM MINUTES**

The Committee received the Minutes of the meeting held on 9 July 2007. Mrs Cornell said that the Tenants Forum was currently undertaking a recruitment drive and was hoping to have new members following the elections in November. It was particularly targeting the Dunmow and Stansted areas where there were currently no representatives.

It was also reported that a former Chairman of the Tenants Forum, Jim Grimshaw had recently passed away.

C23

## **UTTLESFORD PLAY STRATEGY**

It was reported that all districts had been encouraged to produce a play strategy for submission to the Big Lottery for funds towards specific portfolio projects in their areas. All districts in Essex had been working together with the Children's Fund Essex to develop a comprehensive play policy. An audit of play facilities had been undertaken as well as a wide consultation. As a result of this, seven portfolio projects had been devised to improve access to play facilities in the District for children and young people. Presentations had been made to the Area Panels and they had all endorsed the development of the strategy.

RESOLVED that the submission of the play strategy to the Big Lottery be approved.

**NOTICE OF MOTION**

Councillor R C Chamberlain proposed the following motion.

“The Community Committee of Uttlesford District Council notes that in 2006/07 over 40% of the rent income paid by the Council’s tenants had to be paid over to the Government in the form of negative housing subsidy. The actual figure was £4.24 million. The Committee deplores this payment as yet another form of tax, this time on Council tenants within Uttlesford, and calls on the Government to take urgent action to remove this unreasonable burden in order for the Council to invest all of its rent income in the maintenance of Uttlesford’s housing stock and facilitating new social housing projects for local people. Accordingly, the Committee instructs the Chief Executive to raise this matter with the Government by making appropriate responses to the consultation papers and as a matter of urgency, to arrange a meeting with relevant Members and officers at ministerial level so that the Council’s concerns can be addressed and a solution found which is fair to the Council’s tenants”.

Councillor Chamberlain said he had been asked to put forward this motion on behalf of the new Administration as it wanted to see a fairer deal for tenants. He explained that the complicated systems in relation to housing finance meant that the Government set a complex formula for the setting of rents and the calculation of negative housing subsidy meant that a percentage of this income went to central Government. Uttlesford was penalised for maintaining its housing stock to a high level as a proportion of the money raised from its rents was used elsewhere in the country. The Council was paying over £4 million from the HRA where this should be used to invest in the housing stock and other housing schemes in the District. He said the current process was effectively a stealth tax on tenants.

Councillor Morson agreed with this statement and said that efficient councils like Uttlesford were penalised by this process. He had raised this issue last year with Sir Alan Haselhurst MP and a reply had been received from Ruth Kelly, the then Minister that there would be no movement on Government policy. He hoped that a face to face meeting could be arranged with the new Minister as this would be the most effective way of explaining the council’s case.

Councillor Ketteridge said that there were 179 councils in a similar position to Uttlesford. At the recent Local Government Conference, this issue had been raised by a number of councils and it seemed to be becoming a real issue particularly in the southern part of the country. It was suggested that this matter should be raised at future Tenant Forum meetings and tenants themselves could make individual representations to the Government. Members agreed that it was important to continue putting pressure on the Government.

RESOLVED that the Motion be adopted.

The meeting ended at 8.50 pm.