

**COMMUNITY COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD  
SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 18 SEPTEMBER 2008**

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

Also present at the invitation of the Chairman:- Councillor S Barker.

Tenant Forum Representative:- Mrs D Cornell.

Officers in attendance:- J Mitchell (Chief Executive), G Bradley  
(Community Partnerships Manager), D Burrige (Director of  
Operations), S Clarke (Housing Strategy and Planning Policy  
Manager), H Joy (Tenant Participation Officer), R Millership  
(Head of Housing Services), T Morton (Principal Planning  
Officer), P Snow (Committee and Electoral Services Manager),  
C Thomas (HRA Accountant), A Webb (Interim Director of  
Central Services), and C Wingfield (Museum Curator).

**C19 PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

The Chairman welcomed members of the public, Councillor Barker and representatives of Swan Housing Association.

Statements were then made by Rod Blacklock and Jo Waters as residents of Leaden Roding, concerning the proposed development of Holloway Crescent and Holloway Close. Summaries of their statements are appended to these Minutes.

**C20 POTENTIAL REDEVELOPMENT OF HOLLOWAY CRESCENT AND  
HOLLOWAY CLOSE LEADEN RODING/REPORT OF THE HOUSING  
INITIATIVE TASK GROUP**

The Chairman suggested that these items be linked for discussion purposes and taken early in the meeting in view of the attendance of several interested parties. She invited Trevor Burns and Ash Ahmed of Swan Housing Association to speak in explanation of the Association's position as the Council's selected partner.

Trevor Burns said that his Association had three aims in progressing this scheme. The first was to take full account of the feedback to the initial consultation. The second aim was to obtain approval for further consultation to be carried out. The final aim was to proceed towards the submission of a planning application.

Swan had consulted local stakeholders on both proposed phases one and two. This would provide for five existing households in Holloway Crescent and eight in Holloway Close to be re-housed for the broader benefit of all residents. As part of the consultation, Swan's representatives had met with

the majority of the residents of Holloway Close, a number of immediate neighbouring householders, and with representatives of the Concern Group. Residents of Holloway Crescent had been generally supportive of the project. His feeling was that the majority of residents in Holloway Close were in favour of the development taking place but he acknowledged there was some concern about the uncertainty surrounding the development of the Close.

Mr Burns said that approximately 150 residents had visited the exhibition held as part of the consultation, and that 25 of these had submitted survey forms. He summarised briefly the content of the survey forms and the matters of concern they had raised.

He acknowledged that the Concern Group had raised doubts about the sustainability of the development. These matters would be covered in the technical analysis that would form part of the next consultation. It was his job to find technical solutions. Once solutions had been found, the outcome would be the provision of high quality new homes, the replacement of the vacated sheltered block, and a potential capital land receipt to the Council.

In concluding, he expressed the hope that the Committee would give its approval for the scheme to proceed so that further consultation could be carried out with all interested parties.

At the Chairman's invitation, Councillor Barker spoke as the member for The Rodings ward. She said she was pleased with the interest shown by the Concern Group and had asked officers to arrange for a further public meeting.

In responding to matters raised by Mr Blacklock and Mrs Waters, she said that she supported re-development of the site as the development was outdated and a solution was needed to replace the empty flats. The extra space brought about by the re-development would help to provide more housing.

The residents of Holloway Close included seven Council tenants and Mr Clayden the Parish Council Chairman, who was a private occupier. Mr Clayden had quite correctly absented himself from any Parish Council meeting at which this matter had been discussed as he had a prejudicial interest.

With regard to the suggestion that details of the rejected schemes should be placed in the public arena, Councillor Barker said that this would not be appropriate.

She accepted that a number of issues remained to be addressed. These included deciding on suitable access arrangements; an appropriate density for the site; and protection for the green space area. It might be necessary to lose some existing verges to accommodate more parking spaces. She hoped that a mix of social and market housing could be provided with a suitable proportion of the houses reserved for local residents, and that tenants would receive the utmost consideration.

At this point, Members received the Minutes of the Housing Initiative Task Group held on 8 September. The Minutes included a recommendation that

the two phases of the proposed development be approved, the first as soon as possible, and the second following a further period of appropriate consultation. The Head of Housing Services commented that the most successful schemes were generally those where full community engagement could be achieved. Assuming that Members wished to proceed, the intention now was to carry out further consultation and the Concern Group would have a considerable input into that process.

Councillor Chamberlain then proposed adoption of the recommendation of the Task Group and the recommendations in the report. He said that the Task Group had given considerable scrutiny to the re-development of both Holloway Crescent and Holloway Close over a long period of time and had been probing in the questions that had been asked.

He had listened carefully to the comments made and was pleased that local residents had shown such concern. As a result, there was considerable pressure on Swan to get the scheme right. He was sure that this would be done openly as the integrity of the people concerned was not in doubt.

Holloway Crescent could not continue in its present form. The sheltered block could not be adapted and so a complete re-development was the only realistic option. The outcome would be a scheme providing more appropriate and suitable accommodation incorporating better facilities. Phase 1 should proceed at once and phase 2 should follow after further consultation.

Councillor Sell agreed that a decision was needed and asked for details of the level of housing need in Leaden Roding. He asked the representative from Swan Housing why the level of response was such a small proportion of those who had visited the exhibition and what he thought that might indicate?

Mr Burns explained that most of the questions raised had been concerned with parking problems and preservation of the green. He was not able to speculate why the level of response had not been higher.

The Housing Strategy and Planning Policy Manager said that the figures indicated the need for a mix of dwellings but she did not have the statistics to hand. Councillor Barker commented that she thought there had been 39 applications for ten units in Leaden Roding and 30 applications for ten further units elsewhere in the Rodings area.

Councillor Morson said he had been impressed by the level of consultation undertaken by officers and by Swan Housing and thought that there was a high degree of acceptance of the need for new housing at this location. He supported the recommendations as there had been problems at Holloway Crescent for a long time.

RESOLVED that:

1. the development of phase 1 of the sheltered housing block and associated parking area at Holloway Crescent be approved for implementation, in conjunction with Swan Housing Association, taking into account comments made as part of the recent consultation exercise, and that a planning application be prepared for submission in due course; and

2. in principle, the development of Holloway Close proceed, as phase 2 of the scheme, after a further period of consultation.

C21 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E L Bellingham-Smith, J E Hudson, and J E Menell.

C22 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 19 June 2008 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

C23 **BUSINESS ARISING**

- (i) **Minute C13 – Multi-use Games Area, The Green, Stoneyfield Drive, Stansted**

Councillor Sell asked for an update on progress towards provision of this games area. The Community Partnerships Manager confirmed that funding had now arrived and negotiations were taking place with a view to commencing on site by the end of the year.

- (ii) **Minute C14 – Operation Highbrow Review**

In response to a question it was confirmed that officers would liaise with the Leader of the Council in making appropriate representations to the Minister.

C24 **LEAD OFFICER'S REPORT**

The Director of Operations submitted her Lead Officer's report.

A further letter had today been received from BT seeking a response by 1 October to an approach to parish councils seeking their agreement to adopt specified telephone boxes and to contribute towards their maintenance in order to secure their retention.

The Director of Operations confirmed that, in accordance with the consultation, the Committee had objected to the removal of all but four of the telephones listed for removal by BT but had so far not received a response. She also confirmed that there were restrictions on some boxes that were listed for preservation.

Members generally expressed displeasure at the unrealistically short deadline that had been set for a response. As a result it was agreed to write to BT seeking to extend the deadline and to obtain a specific response to the Council's previous representations on this matter. It was also felt that the

telecoms regulator might be able to investigate the unsatisfactory consultation process.

Parish councils were encouraged to respond by 1 October if they were able to do so.

RESOLVED that a letter be sent to BT seeking an extension to 1 December of the time allowed for parish councils to respond to the invitation to adopt specified telephone boxes, and seeking a response to the Council's previous representations.

The Community Partnerships Manager updated Members on progress towards the introduction of free swimming by the Government. A pot of money was available to provide for free swimming for the over 60s in Uttlesford and appropriate arrangements would be made with participating leisure centres by the end of November. The same facility would shortly be available for under 16 year olds. The level of subsidy was not yet known but an expression of interest would be submitted.

She advised Members that the Council would be able to apply for a capital sum to develop a new pool in the Stansted area.

The Interim Director of Central Services said that he expected the funding for free swimming to be incorporated into the annual RSG settlement within three years.

C25

## **BUDGET MONITORING**

The Interim Director of Central Services introduced Charmaine Thomas as the Council's HRA Accountant.

In presenting the second budget monitoring report, Mr Webb said that the Committee's net expenditure was estimated to be underspent by £165k against the profiled budgets. The report highlighted variations of more than 10% as compared with the profiled budgets. There were sound justifications for most of these variations.

A number of concerns were listed in the report, including the implications of a pay award above the estimated 2.5%, and the impact of substantial increases in utility and fuel costs. The target vacancy saving of 5% was considered to be unrealistic and it was suggested that the Council should move towards a more manageable level of vacancy savings when the next Medium Term Financial Strategy was agreed. This would involve finding further savings elsewhere.

The financial situation remained grave and there was no scope for budgets to be overspent or income levels not being achieved.

Councillor Howell asked about the under-spending of £121k under public health. The Interim Director replied that this was principally due to charges levied by the border inspection post at Stansted Airport. DEFRA had now

restricted the charges that could be made and income streams would reduce considerably from now on.

**Councillor Sell declared a personal interest as his mother was a member of Stansted Day Centre Management Committee.** He asked whether the level of under-spending on day centres was a good thing as recent staffing changes meant that voluntary management committees were receiving less support than before. The Head of Housing Services said that she would need to carry out a more detailed check to ascertain why the service was under-spent. The Council was moving towards a position where it would contribute towards the cost of on-site management. If this arrangement was successful it would be extended to other day centres. She would report back to Members on the management of day centres.

Councillor Sell said he had received feedback that day centres were not receiving the same level of support as before and that officers were overloaded with work.

Councillor Hicks agreed that there was a lack of staff in most departments although officers were doing their best in difficult circumstances.

Speaking as a trustee of Saffron Walden day centre, Mrs Cornell agreed with the comments made. The expected help at the day centre had not materialised and she would like to see the post advertised.

In response to a further question, the Director of Operations explained the different roles performed by the port health service and the border inspection post.

RESOLVED that the budget monitoring report be noted and that a report be made at the next meeting by heads of division responsible for services in which budgets for expenditure or income showed a variation of more than 10% from the profiled budget.

## C26 **MID YEAR REVIEW OF THE CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2008/09**

The Committee received a mid year update on the capital programme. None of the projects were over budget and only one was expected to over-run into the following financial year. Members noted the report.

## C27 **MID YEAR REVIEW OF THE HRA CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2008/09**

The Interim Director of Central Services presented the mid year review of the HRA capital programme. The Head of Housing Services commented that it had proven difficult to profile these budgets as some were reviewed on a quarterly basis. The budgets would continue to be monitored carefully. Members noted the report.

**PERMISSION TO START THE HERITAGE QUEST CENTRE PROJECT**

The Curator outlined the funding arrangements for the Heritage Quest Centre project and sought the Committee's agreement for the Chief Executive to sign the Permission to Start form. She was pleased to be able to advise Members that the remaining funding had fallen to a sum in the region of £69k below the threshold of £100k which was the maximum figure the Museum Society had agreed to underwrite.

The landfill tax grant of £50,000 from Viridor Waste Management Ltd had now been secured by the payment of the necessary third party contribution to release the grant. Other funding had since reduced the outstanding figure to the sum already mentioned.

Although the process of obtaining funding had been frustrating, this removed the final obstacle to the scheme commencing without any financial risk to the Council. It was anticipated the project could now commence on Monday, 3 November.

At the Council meeting on 22 July, Members had expressed concerns about whether the land gifted could revert back to the Council in the event of the project failing, or the charity ceasing to exist. The report summarised the legal position in some detail. The conclusion was that the land could not revert back once the project had commenced but that restrictions on the use of the land remained binding on the charity or on any future owners.

In proposing the recommendation, Councillor Morson said that much credit was due to the Curator for her determination and persistence in ensuring that the project was now able to commence.

RESOLVED that:

1. the Chief Executive be delegated to sign the Permission to Start form in relation to the Heritage Quest Centre, now that the remaining matching funding had fallen below the threshold of £100,000 to be underwritten by the Museum Society;
2. the construction programme be noted as well as the measures necessary to ensure that the site would revert to the Council if the project were to fail or the Museum Society should cease to exist.

**BIOLOGICAL RECORDS IN ESSEX (BRIE)**

The Principal Planning Officer reported on the Biological Records in Essex project (BRIE) which had been set up to collect and provide records of wildlife and geology in Essex. This was a collaborative project between local authorities, Essex museums, the Essex Wildlife Trust and others to deliver biodiversity information for wider use. Uttlesford would be involved through the Museum which would help to provide improved public access to information about wildlife. The Museum had been working on this project for a long time but the BRIE project would make it easier to identify bio-diversity to assist with the work of protection.

The Museum already had a seat on the development steering group leading to the formation of BRIE as a limited company and it was hoped the Museum would be able directly to participate in one or more aspects of the project once this had happened. The cost of the Council's annual membership of BRIE was expected to be in the region of £3,000 a year.

Members were supportive of the idea of setting up a partnership to carry out this important area of work.

RESOLVED that the Chief Executive be authorised to sign the BRIE Memorandum of Understanding on the Council's behalf.

### C30 **AREA FORUMS**

The Community Partnerships Manager provided an update on the most recent area forum meetings on 2 and 4 September. There were no matters specifically to be referred to this Committee and she was still in the process of compiling a comprehensive list of questions raised by members of the public. All questions raised would continue to be recorded and any feedback obtained made available on the Uttlesford website. The public reaction to the new format remained generally positive.

Members discussed generally how the area forums were performing and how they could be improved. Without any conclusions being reached, the matters discussed were:

- Improved publicity for meetings
- Whether each agency should be invited to make a presentation at every meeting
- The possibility of extending an invitation to public utility companies
- The provision of written reports at the meetings and/or on the website
- Rotating meetings in the south area so that some were located in Stansted
- How to encourage more participation from the local press
- How to contact hard to reach groups

In answer to a further question, Mrs Bradley confirmed that a deadline was set for responses to questions raised and these were collated for eventual publication. In relation to hard to reach groups, Councillor Sell asked that a report be submitted to this Committee by the migrant worker group.

### C31 **HOUSING POLICY LAND DISPOSAL**

The Committee received a report recommending that three parcels of land at Manor Road, Stansted; Coney Acre, Rickling; and Waldgrooms, Great Dunmow, be transferred to a Registered Social Landlord at nil value. This would enable the development of homeless accommodation and affordable housing for rent, subject to planning consent and a successful Housing



Corporation bid for funding. The transfer would enable officers to negotiate nomination rights.

***Councillor Schneider declared a personal interest in this matter as she had recently attended a function arranged by the Chelmer Housing Partnership.***

RECOMMENDED to Council that the sites at Manor Road, Stansted; Coney Acre, Rickling; and Waldgrooms, Great Dunmow, be transferred to a RSL at nil value for the development of homeless accommodation and affordable housing.

## C32 **REVIEW OF SHELTERED HOUSING AND LIFELINE SERVICE**

The Head of Housing Services reported on the outcome of the housing service divisional plan for 2007/08 proposing that a review of the sheltered housing and Lifeline service was due and should begin in September this year. The Committee was invited to establish a task group to carry out this review, with a membership of five members, together with two tenant forum representatives, and with a remit to follow detailed terms of reference listed in full in the report. The group would be guided by advice from a Lifeline officer, sheltered housing officers, and representatives from Supporting People, the PCT, and from social care.

RECOMMENDED that:

- 1 a sheltered housing Task Group be established with the terms of reference included in paragraph 12 of the report, to undertake a review of sheltered housing and the Lifeline service by September 2009;
- 2 Councillors Bellingham-Smith, Chamberlain, Hudson, Morson, and Redfern be appointed as members of the Task Group, together with two Tenant Forum representatives to be nominated; and
- 3 Lifeline and sheltered housing officers, as well as representatives of Supporting People, the Primary Care Trust, and social care, be invited to advise and guide the Task Group, as appropriate.

## C33 **LONG TERM EMPTY HOUSES – ANALYSIS OF POSTAL SURVEY**

A progress report was submitted on empty properties within the district. This followed a discussion at the Committee's meeting in March 2008 regarding the Empty Homes Strategy. Officers had been requested to contact the owners of long term empty properties to establish the extent of the problem.

Research was carried out using information obtained from Council Tax records. Of the 244 properties not owned by either this Council or private companies such as BAA and Railtrack, responses had now been received from 108 owners. These indicated a range of reasons for the buildings concerned remaining empty. A significant proportion had been brought back

into use by the owners; only 15% had been identified as having a need for further action, such as advice and, if necessary, enforcement.

All owners had received a questionnaire with details of the PLACE scheme which enabled the owner concerned to lease their property to a nominated RSL in return for renovation work to bring the building up to the decent homes standard. Very few of those responding had shown interest in this scheme.

The Committee noted the report. Councillor Morson asked the Housing Initiative Task Group to examine in more detail the problems caused by housing voids and this was agreed.

The meeting ended at 9.25 pm.

## **COMMUNITY COMMITTEE ON 18 SEPTEMBER 2008 STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

### **Rod Blacklock**

Mr Blacklock said he was speaking on behalf of Holloway Crescent Sheltered Accommodation Concern. This was a group representing over 90 concerned residents of Leaden Roding and had been set up in view of the cloud of rumour and deceit which had overshadowed the Council's proposals.

Swan Housing Association had held an exhibition in the village hall. In spite of opening hours restricted to the daytime, more than 150 residents had attended the exhibition. Councillor Barker had promised to be available for discussion with residents but had been in attendance for only half an hour. Only phase one of the scheme had been displayed. This appeared to indicate that some of the green space area would be developed.

He referred to parking difficulties on site and said that this was unlikely to be improved as only space for twenty vehicles would be provided for 16 dwellings. He mentioned a Swan publication called 'The Issue' which referred to the company tackling anti-social behaviour. He thought this to be irrelevant to Leaden Roding.

With reference to the views of the Parish Council, he said that David Clayden had been obliged to stand down from meetings when the development was being debated and this had hampered discussions.

Mr Blacklock said that there had been no answers forthcoming to legitimate questions. He referred to problems caused by the communal heating system at Holloway Crescent and said this matter needed to be resolved. Finally, he asked for the details of the schemes submitted by the other two developers to be made public. The proposals shown to the public were unpopular and unnecessary.

### **Jo Waters**

Mrs Waters said that she was speaking as secretary of the Concern Group. The group covered residents in the Holloway Crescent and Close area, including Dunmow Road. Members of the group had voted on the options presented and had expressed a preference for an alternative proposal. The residents in Holloway Close had shown no desire to move and the Council's proposals had caused unnecessary emotional distress. The proposal would mix family homes with elderly residents and many did not want this.

She questioned the sustainability of the development. There were no medical services or post office in the village and very little employment. The likely number of extra vehicles would cause congestion. The school was well subscribed and was hemmed in on all sides with no capacity to expand. She was also concerned about the main drainage arrangements and the extra pressure on parking space. The majority of new residents would be likely to own cars and this might necessitate the use of grass verges or the green for parking spaces. This would impact on the quality of life.

Mrs Waters sought reassurances on the use of the existing communal heating system. Other conflicts would arise especially in connection with the green as many new residents would bring with them new children causing pressure on the space available for play.

She had sent a proposal to Uttlesford for an alternative method of redeveloping the sheltered block, retaining the garage area, and leaving the existing green intact. Holloway Close should be left as it is as there is no need to re-develop. A letter had been sent from the Parish Council fully supporting the concerns raised.