

**COMMUNITY COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 20 NOVEMBER 2008**

Present:- Councillor S V Schneider – Chairman.
Councillors E Bellingham-Smith, R Chamberlain, E W Hicks,
S J Howell, J E Menell, M Miller and G Sell.

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

Tenant Forum Representatives:- Mrs D Cornell and Mr D Parish.

Museum Society Ltd Representatives:- Mrs J Bullen and Mr P Salvidge

Officers in attendance:- D Burrige (Director of Operations), R Millership
(Head of Housing Services), E Petrie (Housing Management
Manager), R Procter (Democratic Services Officer).

C34 PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Barker and members of the public.

A statement was then made by Rod Blacklock as a resident of Leaden Roding, concerning the proposed development of Holloway Crescent and Holloway Close. A copy of his statement is appended to these Minutes.

C35 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hudson, Morson, Redfern, Sadler and Yarwood.

C36 MINUTES

In view of the comments made by Mr Blacklock, the Chairman asked whether there were any amendments to the Minutes of the previous meeting, held on 18 September 2008. No amendments were requested by Members, and the Minutes were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

C37 BUSINESS ARISING

(i) Minute C31 – Housing policy land disposal

Councillor Sell referred to the press release issued by the Council regarding the disposal of land. He had been disappointed at the use of the word 'hostel', as this word could have unfortunate connotations. He would prefer to see other terms used in describing the type of facility to be provided, such as 'short stay managed accommodation'. Councillor Barker suggested that a shorter name should be sought for this type of accommodation.

C38 LEAD OFFICER'S REPORT Page 1

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

She reminded Members that the name of this committee would change to Community and Housing Committee after the date of the next Council meeting.

She explained the background to the expected transfer of Dunmow public toilets to Dunmow Town Council. This course of action had been considered at the recent meeting of the Environment Committee, and was seen as appropriate in view of the development by the Town Council of a Town Square to the front of the new library. Financial support for the facility would taper from 80% of the existing budget of £10,350 to nil over four years. The transfer of the asset would be undertaken by the Finance and Administration Committee.

The Director of Operations went on to report on the construction of the new Thaxted Day Centre. Work was advancing very satisfactorily on this exciting project, and handover to the Council would take place on 1 December. The Tenant Participation Officer, Helen Joy, had done a superb job in supporting those who used the Day Centre throughout this period. Councillor Menell suggested that the next meeting of this committee should be held in the Day Centre. All those present were in favour of this idea, and officers agreed to make the appropriate arrangements.

Regarding Holloway Close and Holloway Crescent, a brief update was provided. In response to a question from Councillor Chamberlain on discussions with residents, the Head of Housing Services said that residents of Holloway Crescent were thrilled about the proposals. The majority of residents of Holloway Close were also enthusiastic, although there were some who had reservations.

Councillor Barker then spoke, with the consent of the Chairman. She said she had attended a meeting of Leaden Roding Parish Council at which the Concern Group had expressed much antagonism regarding the proposals for the development at Holloway Close and Holloway Crescent. She had invited Mrs Essex, as a representative of the Parish Council, to come to this committee meeting, so as to give the Parish Council a direct report of the proceedings. She hoped she could make the point that the proposals represented an attempt to improve the housing provision at this site.

Councillor Barker went on to say that the existing accommodation was unsatisfactory for residents in many ways. The initial meetings had deliberately sought general public views. Now that detailed plans were to be prepared, the involvement of residents in the design stage was critical. The development would give people improved accommodation. She concluded by contrasting the suspicion towards the Council's proposals with the absence of comparable hostile feeling to other affordable housing developments within Leaden Roding. In her view the Minutes of the last meeting were a fair reflection of what was said. She thanked the Chairman for allowing her to speak.

The Director of Operations continued with her Lead Officer's report. She referred Members to the Food Safety Plan 2008/09, which was available on the Council's website for Members to comment on.

Regarding Operation Highbrow, an update on obtaining information from other authorities involved in the incident would be provided at the next meeting. Councillor Sell said that Stansted Parish Council had been very impressed with the Emergency Planning Officer at their recent meeting with her.

C39

CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2008/09 to 2011/12

The Director of Operations presented the report of the Principal Accountant, for the committee to approve in principle. She explained that the report included a proviso relating to the Landsbanki capitalisation application, as the outcome of this could give rise to alterations to the proposed programme.

Councillor Howell noted that community project grants included an allocation to area panels, which had now been superseded by the two area forums. Members recalled that there had been an intention that area forums would not have budgets. Accordingly, Councillor Howell moved and Councillor Bellingham-Smith seconded a motion, which was carried unanimously:

RESOLVED that the amount of £30K previously allocated to the area panels revert to the Community Committee, and the Chairman together with Officers have delegated power to allocate grants from this sum, providing that any matters likely to be contentious be brought before Community Committee for consideration.

Members requested that Officers provide the Committee with a list of community project grants. Members then agreed the recommendations made in the report and it was

RESOLVED that subject to the outcome of the Landsbanki capitalisation application, and having regard to the resolution above regarding funding for area panels, Members recommend to the Finance and Administration Committee the proposed revised capital budget for 2008/09 together with the proposed capital budgets for each of 2009/10, 2010/11 and 2011/12 as set out in Appendix 1 to the report before Committee.

C40

HRA CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2008/09 – 2011/12

The Committee received the report of the Principal Accountant on the capital programme for the Housing Revenue Account. In reply to a question from Councillor Chamberlain, the Head of Housing Services gave a brief update on the housing options appraisal. Work was currently underway on questionnaires relating to stock condition, and the options appraisal stage would follow on from this.

The Committee then agreed the recommendations in the report, and it was

RESOLVED to recommend to the Finance and Administration Committee the proposed revised Housing Revenue Account capital budget for 2008/09 together with the proposed capital budgets for each of 2009/10, 2010/11 and 2011/12 as set out in Appendix 1 to the report before Committee

C41

REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES

Members received the report of the Director of Operations. She said the report invited Members to review fees and charges for services covered by the Committee. The report contained suggested increases for certain charges to reflect a rise in inflation. It was the intention to bring future reviews before the Committee on an annual basis, to enable a regular, robust yet fair assessment.

Councillor Howell raised the question of why the Council provided certain services, and asked why pet micro-chipping was part of the remit of the Council. The Director of Operations replied that there were benefits to offering this service in terms of managing costs of dealing with strays. The suggested charge for micro-chipping was pitched mid-way between charges for service by vets and by pet shops.

Councillor Howell said he was still not persuaded that the Council should be offering certain services at all. There were many commercial organisations to which these services could be contracted out, such as pest control agencies. The amount of money raised from offering these services was not substantial. By raising this point he said he did not intend to cast any doubt at all on the personal expertise of those officers who currently had this responsibility. The Director of Operations replied that there were some anomalies in the range of services offered by the Council and that it would be appropriate to carry out a review. Members noted that Scrutiny Committee was presently conducting work on fees and charges, and that the aspect of what should be part of the Council's remit would form part of that review.

More detailed figures for pest control would be made available in the budget monitoring report for the service.

Mrs Cornell referred to the proposed charges for the Lifeline service, and asked whether the charge was included in Supporting People funding. The Director of Operations confirmed that this was the case. The Head of Housing Services said the charge for Lifeline related to private residents, as the rest of the individuals concerned were tenants. Their fees for Lifeline were therefore met by Supporting People. There were a small number of people who did not fall into this category, but a contingency fund had been identified, in order to address any hardship produced by an increase to the fee.

Councillor Sell said it was unfortunate that no review of the Lifeline service had taken place for nine years. This was a crucial service, not a means of generating revenue. He found the report lacked sufficient data for Members to make a proper judgment on the costs of running the service.

The Head of Housing Services said that whilst the Council issued invoices for the charge, the costs were met by Supporting People. Information from Supporting People on Lifeline charges applied across Essex revealed that the weekly amount charged by Uttlesford was on the low side when compared to other authorities. The costs were fully funded, except for the twenty tenants referred to already, for whom it was necessary to be mindful of the impact of any increase. It was for this reason that a contingency fund had been identified.

Members went on to discuss the proposals for admission charges to the Saffron Walden Museum. There would be costs of changes to signage and leaflets. Mr Salvidge recalled that such costs had been estimated at £1,500. Members were particularly concerned about the possible impact on visitor numbers if entrance charges were increased. Members considered the recommendations of the Museum Management Working Group, which differed from those set out in the report before the Committee. Councillor Chamberlain said he was not in favour either of doubling the entrance fee or of raising the fee twice in two years. Councillor Sell agreed, and was troubled by the reference in the Working Group's Minutes to the Curator's suggestions having been ignored, as the Curator was best placed to understand the impact of raising charges at the Museum. Encouraging visitors to the Museum should be the starting point.

Councillor Howell said he had reservations about the concept of charging for things which were already paid for by council tax. The budget should cover the Museum, and entrance fees were an irrelevance.

The Chairman noted that the Council subsidised visits at £12 per visit. Councillor Bellingham-Smith said that children should be able to visit for free. Councillor Chamberlain asked whether a scheme could be researched to allow Uttlesford residents free access to the Museum. The Director of Operations said that the possibility of introducing a leisure card had been explored during the Best Value Review, but that there were legal implications to consider.

Members concluded that in view of the opinions and comments above, the proposals set out in the appendix to the report were acceptable, and the recommendation of the Museum Management Working Group at MM26 should therefore be disregarded. A motion to this effect being duly proposed, seconded and carried, it was

RESOLVED that the proposals for fees and charges for 2009/10 set out in the report before the Committee be included in the Council's budget.

C42

BT RED PAYPHONE BOX REVIEW

The Director of Operations presented her report on the rationalisation of payphones. Consultation with parishes and public had taken place regarding proposals to remove certain telephone boxes for which measurements showed low usage. The full list of objections had been circulated to Councillors in October. It was now necessary to bring the process to a conclusion by agreeing which BT decisions should be challenged and which

remaining objections should be withdrawn, and to enable applications to proceed for the adoption or sponsorship of telephone boxes by parish councils. The Council could opt to exercise its local veto, but the Director of Operations advised that it was essential that any objections should be robust, in order to avoid a costly appeal.

Councillor Howell said the Council should persevere with objections where these had been received. Furthermore, he had personal experience of inadequate mobile telephone network coverage in the area of Little Bardfield, despite BT's assertions that such coverage existed. He was not therefore confident of the accuracy of such comments in relation to other sites.

Councillor Hicks said that for Members of this Committee to consider each site in turn would be a laborious process, which would be a waste of Officers' and Committee time. He put a motion, which was seconded by Councillor Bellingham-Smith, that Officers take the matter forward on behalf of the Committee. It was therefore

RESOLVED that Members delegate to the Director of Operations, in consultation with the Chair of Community Committee and the Leader of the Council, the following powers:

- 1 the identification of any BT decisions on payphone boxes which should be challenged, in accordance with requirements for objective justification and proportionate reasons and having in particular regard to whether consultation responses had been received in respect of each site;
- 2 the withdrawal of the Council's remaining objections to the removal of payphone boxes;
- 3 signing off the Council's statement of its final decision.

C43 **SHELTERED HOUSING TASK GROUP MINUTES**

The Committee received the Minutes of the first meeting of this Group. Councillor Chamberlain said that whilst some agencies had unfortunately not attended, the meeting had been interesting. It had been apparent that the extent of work which would be required was more extensive than had at first been thought, and the Group's members were keen to move forward with the programme they had identified.

C44 **TENANT FORUM MINUTES**

The Committee received the Minutes of the meetings of the Tenant Forum on 7 July and 1 September 2008. Mrs Cornell gave a brief update on correspondence with the Local Government Association and with the Minister for Housing regarding the Forum's letter of objection to the negative housing subsidy.

C45 **ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS**

The Chairman agreed that recommendations made by the Museum Management Working Group could be considered. It was

RESOLVED that the recommendations of the Museum Management Working Group be accepted as follows:

- 1 Museum staff proceed with insurance re-valuations for ceramics and glass in 2008/09 and ethnography in 2009/10 as described in the report, provided that costs remain within estimates and the Museum Society pay for the valuation of the ceramics and glass collection;
- 2 For other collections, staff prepare a report for consideration by the Museum Society and Museum Management Working Group before end March 2010 on insurance options for other collections, and a programme for updating insurance valuations for each collection.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending. The meeting ended at 9.00 pm.

**COMMUNITY COMMITTEE ON 20 NOVEMBER 2008
STATEMENT BY MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC**

Rod Blacklock

Thank you for allowing me to speak at this Meeting. Due to the conflict of opinion between the Elected Councillor and her constituents regarding this proposed development, the usual channel of making the following points on our behalf, regarding the minutes of the Meeting Held on 18 September, is not open to us. I however, *do* have a few reservations, and on behalf of the Members of the H C S A C G, I wish to see them amended, prior to acceptance.

Madam Chairman, I have 4 major Concerns regarding the minutes as currently recorded.

C20, Paragraph 4, line 7. States as follows “the majority of residents of Holloway Close, a number of the Concern Group, Residents of Holloway Crescent, had (NOT) been generally supportive of the project.” This Most Certainly is not a True Reflection of the facts, and I recommend the word “NOT” be inserted between “had” and “been”.

C20, Paragraph 18, 2nd sentence. “He was not able to speculate why the level of response had not been higher”. Madam Chairman, this is simply not true, and I ask all present on the occasion of the meeting to recall what he actually stated, which *was* that *he* “thought the majority of the residents wished their concerns to be presented through the Concern Group”.

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

Paragraph 3, final sentence. “He thought this to be irrelevant to Leaden Roding”. The actual words used were:- “That is not at all encouraging, and is most certainly *not* what we want in our Village”.

Madam Chairman:- An Important item I presented during my Statement, has not been recorded, and I would like to see it included. It regards a question I had put to the Leaden Roding Parish Council “Are you FOR or AGAINST the proposed development?” “Their reply was unanimously in support of the Concern Group...”

Thank you Madam Chairman, may I pass you the Copies of my original Statement, and the one you have permitted me to present tonight?

Holloway **C**rescent **S**heltered **A**ccommodation **C**oncern **G**roup
Rod Blacklock, 18 Holloway Crescent, Leaden Roding, CM6 1QD (Tel: 01279 876603)

I am speaking with the approval of, and on behalf of the above named group. A group formed, and consisting of over 90 village residents.

For some months, our Village had been under a cloud of rumour and deceit, regarding proposals to demolish and reconstruct parts of it, and on 20 August 2008, Swan Developments, with the assistance of Councillor Susan Barker, and in conjunction with Uttlesford District Council, held an Exhibition in Leaden Roding Village Hall between the hours of 2 p.m. and 7 o'clock, in order to enlighten us with their proposals. In spite of the exhibition opening hours clashing with the *working day*, it was attended by over 150 local residents, an excellent illustration of the level of concern for such a small Village. Those who attend the Exhibition in the Village Hall had been promised an opportunity to discuss the Development proposals for the Holloway Crescent, Close, and the adjoining site (yet to be disclosed) with Councillor Barker, but in spite of her invitation to meet us there, she was only in attendance for a period of approximately half an hour, during the entire five, that the exhibition was open. The Exhibition only showed proposals for "Phase One" of the plan. Swan provided superimposed diagrams to a Google Earth photograph (not sure how they stand on copyright), not very clear, but this was already showing encroachment of the Green at Holloway Crescent, something previously promised would not happen! How they expect to get away with building 16 properties with provision to park only 20 vehicles obviously will depend on the integrity of our Council Planning Department.

The promotional "giveaways" supplied along with a selection of confectionery, by Swan Developments surely indicates a job opportunity for a Public Relations Officer! The pencils and nick-knacks were nice for the children, but I took particular note of their attempts to reassure us in their publication (hold up brochure) "the issue" of the kind of places they already run, two of the featured articles display the following Headlines:- "Swan Tackles Anti Social Behaviour" and "We can help... Domestic Violence". That is not at all encouraging, and is most certainly *not* what we want in our Village.

The Chairman of our Parish Council, David Clayden, has been forced to temporarily stand down each time this issue is discussed at Parish Council Meetings. After he had done exactly that, last Tuesday Evening, I put a question to the remaining Parish Councillors "Are you FOR or AGAINST the proposed development?" Their reply was unanimously in support of the Concern Group, and is graphically delineated in this letter (*hold up letter*).

Those attending the Exhibition on behalf of Swan Developments, and Uttlesford District Council, although perfectly civil, and indeed charming, once again failed to provide answers to legitimate questions. I witnessed one resident of the flats leaving in tears, no one could reassure her with regard to the communal Central Heating System, the Swan representative claimed they knew nothing of it? They gave conflicting replies to the same questions. They seemed reluctant to advance *any* answers. I specifically asked for evidence of the other two Developers that the Council Claim to have consulted with regard to this site. No Reply, although one gentleman from Swan did say, and I quote. "Surely this is a matter of Public Information". Is it? I ask again, "Do you know who they are?" Will somebody please tell me?

In conclusion, the entire scheme is unpopular and generally unnecessary. The empty, mismanaged existing block of single person accommodation, should of course be utilised, or, with what ever is required to replace it, to be constructed on the existing footprint. A more detailed ~~outline~~ ^{Page 2} of our concerns, is to be delivered by the following speaker, Mrs. Joanna Walters.