

**COMMUNITY AND HOUSING COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES  
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 18 JUNE 2009**

Present: Councillor R H Chamberlain (Chairman)  
Councillors E C Abrahams, E L Bellingham-Smith, M L Foley,  
S J Howell, J E Hudson, J A Redfern, D J Sadler, G Sell and S  
Schneider.

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

Museum Society Ltd Representative: Mr P Salvidge.

Also attending: Mr Akin Durowoju (Assistant Director of Development, Swan  
Housing)

Officers in attendance: G Bradley (Community Partnerships Manager), D  
Burrige (Director of Operations), S Wood (Housing Strategy  
and Planning Policy Manager), W Cockerell (Principal  
Environmental Health Officer), R Harborough (Acting Director of  
Development), H Harvey (Elderly Person's Officer), S Martin  
(Head of Customer Support and Revenue Services), R  
Millership (Head of Housing Services), J Mitchell (Chief  
Executive), E Petrie (Housing Management Manager), R Procter  
(Democratic Services Officer),

**CH1 PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

The Chairman welcomed members of the public.

Statements were then made by Rod Blacklock, as a resident of Leaden  
Roding, Jo Waters, on behalf of the Concern Group, Dave Clayden as the  
owner-occupier of Number 30 Holloway Close, and Councillor Geoff Todd, as  
a member of Leaden Roding Parish Council. Summaries of their statements  
are appended to these Minutes.

The Chairman thanked all members of the public who had attended.

**CH2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gower, Mason, Morson  
and Menell. There were no declarations of interest.

**CH3 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of 19 March 2009 were received, confirmed and  
signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CH4

## **CHAIRMAN'S ITEMS**

The Chairman said he wished formally to thank Councillor Schneider for all her work as the Chairman of this Committee over the last two years. She had represented the interests of this Committee to a considerable extent. He would try to follow in her footsteps, and wished Councillor Schneider well as Vice Chairman of the Council.

The Chairman said the Committee had appreciated the interesting presentation given before the meeting by Supporting People. This issue was an important area of finance for the Council. Councillor Redfern would be the Administration's nominee for the Sheltered Housing and Lifeline Task Group. Councillor Schneider would be taking over as Chairman of that Group.

CH5

## **HOLLOWAY CRESCENT AND HOLLOWAY CLOSE**

The Chairman said he would proceed straight to Agenda items 6 and 14, as they were relevant to Holloway Crescent and Holloway Close, in view of the attendance of many interested members of the public.

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Housing Services. She said this was a short update, as Swan Housing were still preparing detailed costings and information for the planning application. She reminded the meeting that the possibility of redevelopment at this site arose as Officers were of the view that the sheltered housing accommodation was not fit for purpose. Accordingly redevelopment of the sheltered housing site was considered appropriate. Officers had also been asked to investigate the development possibilities regarding a more extensive scheme. Comments of residents and the Concern Group regarding the wider proposals would, where possible, be taken into account should a planning application be submitted. Therefore, Members were being asked to consider whether they wanted this development to be progressed.

Mr Durowoju of Swan Housing addressed the meeting. Much work was being done in looking at what was deliverable, tied into consultation. The scheme should address needs and aspirations of residents. As an affordable housing provider, Swan was not in the business of removing people from their homes, and wanted to work with the community. Subject to consent, the next stage was for the fine details to be drawn up and a planning application to be submitted.

Councillor Chamberlain thanked Mr Durowoju, and asked that the proposals be concluded if possible by the September meeting of the Committee.

Councillor Sell congratulated Councillor Chamberlain on his new role. He queried a discrepancy between the recommendations on the item under discussion as set out in the Minutes of the Housing Initiatives Working Group, with the recommendation in the report. The report did not include the recommendation that if possible a capital receipt should be achieved. He asked what was the capital value, and whether there was an alternative developer, as Swan Housing could not now do what was set out originally.

The Chairman said he had chaired the meeting of the Housing Initiatives Working Group in question, and hoped he could clarify the point. The report had been prepared prior to the meeting of the Group, when this matter had been addressed in some detail. The Minutes were only the provisional, not approved, Minutes, but it had been right to table them for this meeting.

The Chairman went on to say a primary objective was to address the sheltered housing scheme at Holloway Close. The possibility of providing additional social housing was considered. Swan had emerged as the more appropriate developer. A great deal had happened since then in terms of countrywide economic and financial problems. All agreed that a conclusion was needed as there were many concerned residents. It had been hoped that a capital receipt could be achieved, which could be used to progress other sheltered housing schemes in the District. He proposed the following amendment:

'To approve further discussion take place with Swan Housing to ascertain whether a capital receipt could be achieved and a report on all the issues involved be prepared for the next meeting.'

Regarding the capital sum, this amount was not in the public domain, but officers would email Members with this information.

Councillor Foley said it was right to investigate all possibilities. In view of the changed economic circumstances and local public anger, he wondered whether the process could be re-visited.

Councillor Howell said it was clearly not appropriate to have social housing which remained empty, and it was right to submit a planning application for this site. He was interested in what proposals Swan would bring back to the September meeting. However, he was concerned if people felt that they were not being kept informed.

The amendment being put to the vote and carried, the substantive motion was then proposed, seconded and carried.

## RESOLVED

- 1 That the Committee authorise officers to pursue the provision of affordable housing at Holloway Crescent and Holloway Close
- 2 That the Committee agree that an application for planning consent to re-develop the sites is submitted to the Planning Department
- 3 That the Committee note the comments of the Housing Initiatives Working Group and approve further discussions with Swan Housing Association to ascertain whether a capital receipt can be achieved, and a report on all the issues involved be prepared for the September meeting.

## CH6

### **HOUSING INITIATIVES WORKING GROUP**

The Committee considered the Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Initiatives Working Group held on 9 June. The report recommended a review of housing allocation policy and choice based lettings be carried out.

#### **RESOLVED**

- 1 to note the Minutes of the Housing Initiatives Working Group
- 2 to approve the recommendation of the Housing Initiatives Working Group that a review be carried out of the Council's allocation policy and Choice Based Letting scheme to include the following areas:
  - a) an assessment of housing need/choice in relation to the housing waiting list
  - b) the Council's allocation scheme
  - c) the viability of expanding the Choice Based Letting scheme
  - d) housing need in the Uttlesford District.

## CH7

### **LEAD OFFICER'S REPORT**

The Lead Officer presented a report updating Members on various matters. She said that regarding the transfer of certain amenities to Saffron Walden Town Council, this recommendation had been approved at the meeting of Environment Committee earlier this week.

The Chairman commented on the Lead Officer's update on housing rents. He said he wished to highlight the deplorable situation for local rents caused by the Government. He had never known such a situation, and officers had been caused a great deal of unnecessary work. He hoped officers would make representations to the Government regarding the £20K costs.

The Lead Officer referred to the update on a review of day centres. The Lead Officer for the Scrutiny Committee would draw up terms of reference for a review.

Regarding homelessness, it was through the strength of the prevention work by the Housing Options and Homelessness team that the figures had remained similar to those for last year. She referred Members to the three Government initiatives regarding homelessness prevention described in the report.

Regarding the Heritage Quest Centre, the issue of site access had now been resolved, with access via the front of the site.

Councillor Sell welcomed the scrutiny exercise regarding day centres. Regarding housing rents, he hoped officers in housing services liaised with finance, as there would be an impact on resources. Regarding the figure of £30K for Recession Impact Funding, he asked how this was divided with the other authorities benefitting from it. Regarding the CAB service he asked what was the division in funding for the CAB in Saffron Walden and in East

Herts. Regarding the Multi Use Games Area in Stansted, he said the Parish Council had not been made aware of the opening date of July 18.

The Head of Housing Services replied that there was constant communication regarding financial pressures on Housing Services with officers in Finance. She confirmed that representations were being made to Government regarding the £20K costs arising from work on housing rents. Officers had also put together a bid for rent deposit schemes. Regarding Recession Impact Funding, the total of £30K was divided equally so that each authority had £6K each.

The Chairman said he had asked for further information to be reported to the Committee on homelessness in September.

Councillor Foley referred to a recent situation when the Council had approached Thaxted Parish Council about transferring a car park, but that he as one of the Ward Members had not been contacted. Whilst he had received an apology, he wished to make the point that it was essential that communications should include District Councillors.

Councillor Sell asked the Chief Executive to ensure staff were reminded of the importance of communication with Town and Parish Councillors and with Ward Members.

The Community Partnerships Manager said the date for the opening of the Multi Use Games Area in Stansted was provisional. It had been suggested at a meeting of SY2000, at which a representative of the Parish Council was usually present.

RESOLVED to note the report of the Lead Officer.

CH8

## **FELSTED PUBLIC TOILETS**

The Committee considered a report which detailed the outcome of further communications with stakeholders. The public toilets in Felsted were in need of renovation, but were owned by a third party, thus restricting the ability of the Council to carry out repairs. The Head of Customer Support and Revenue Services explained that following a direct approach, the brewery operating The Swan Inn, where the public toilets were located, had indicated it would not refurbish the toilets. Accordingly the report recommended withdrawing management of the existing public toilets and instigating a pilot community toilet scheme.

Members asked about the views of Felsted Parish Council. Councillor Bellingham-Smith said it was difficult to find other alternatives, as no other site was apparent.

Members wished to know if the brewery would be interested in participating in the community toilet scheme. Officers confirmed that this was a possibility. The standard of maintenance and cleanliness of facilities under the scheme would be monitored.

The reason for the dilapidated state of the WC facilities was queried. Officers explained that the budget of £10K for Felsted toilets related mainly to cleaning, with some provision for routine repairs. However, the budget had not provided for replacement of major components, re-plastering or alterations for disability access. For comparison, the refurbishment of the Hill Street toilets in Saffron Walden had cost £70K.

#### RESOLVED

- 1 that a pilot Community Toilet Scheme be pursued as an alternative to existing public toilets at Felsted;
- 2 Members confirm that the Council will withdraw its management and maintenance of the existing public toilets in due course.

CH9

### **GYPSY AND TRAVELLERS REPORT**

The report before the Committee asked Members to endorse the Council's response to the Regional Spatial Strategy Gypsy and Traveller Review. The report had been approved by Environment Committee.

Officers said sites in the District were occupied, and in Felsted the site was full. Many families were in permanent occupation as their children attended local schools. Officers confirmed that the assessment had explored the need for both permanent and 'in transit' pitches. Councillor Howell said Members of Environment Committee supported officers' recommendations as a proportionate response to the review. The increase by 10 to 25 pitches was largely to accommodate the fact that other councils had not taken their fair share. Councillor Schneider agreed that this Council's existing provision of pitches had been very compassionate, but that we should be firm in rejecting the increase in pitches.

Councillor Hudson asked whether there was any evidence of unlicensed camping by travellers. Officers said there was some evidence, but not a great extent.

Councillor Abrahams questioned the availability of work for travellers coming to this area, as times had changed and farmers offered less seasonal agricultural work. There were problems with the condition of sites left by travellers.

RESOLVED that the Committee endorse the Council's response to the RSS Gypsies and Traveller Review.

CH10

### **LONG TERM EMPTY HOMES**

The Committee considered the report of the Principal Environmental Health Officer. The report recommended the renovation of long term empty dwellings following the service of Empty Dwelling Management Orders. Officers had identified a number of properties which were considered suitable for this process. EDMO powers would allow the Council to take over management of such properties for a period of up to 7 years, and to rent the property to a family from the waiting list. Costs could be recovered from rental

income, although this was not guaranteed if extensive renovation was required. A pump priming fund would enable further properties to be renovated. Repeated efforts had been made to encourage owners of empty dwellings to bring their property back into use under the PLACE scheme. However, the owners had not given any indication that they intended to bring their properties back into use.

Councillor Howell thanked officers for their tenacious work on this matter. Whilst the issue affected only a small number of people, it blighted lives. Empty properties could be a fire hazard for neighbours, and could inhibit the sale of their houses, and he knew of one such case in his ward. The proposed initiative was a last resort, and action should be taken where properties were left unoccupied for years. He queried whether the figure of £25K sought for a pump priming capital fund would be enough.

Councillor Redfern agreed with these comments. From her business experience she would suggest that a capital fund of £25K was insufficient for carrying out renovations. A more realistic sum would be £50K, and she proposed an amendment accordingly.

Councillor Sell agreed with what had been said. A property in his ward had been empty for ten years. If this initiative were progressed, it might prompt other owners to take steps themselves. He agreed the sum mentioned was not sufficient.

Councillor Foley said he too knew of an empty property which had already caused damage to nearby properties. It was situated on a busy main road, and next to a car park to which it posed a hazard. He suggested a priority of safety issues be applied when identifying houses to be dealt with under the scheme.

Members asked about the implications of obtaining Compulsory Purchase Orders. Officers explained that in considering this option previously, Members had felt it was not appropriate permanently to deprive people of their property.

A vote on the amendment was carried, and the substantive motion was put.

RESOLVED that a proposal be made to the Finance and Administration Committee to set up a pump priming capital fund of £50,000 to enable the renovation of long term empty dwellings following the service of Empty Dwelling Management Orders.

CH11

## **THAXTED CENTRE FOR THE DISABLED**

The report of the Community Development Officer was considered. The report set out the background to a one-off request that a full grant payment of £3,500 be made. Due to an oversight, the criteria that matched funding be secured had not been met. The report recommended the full grant payment be made, without setting a precedent. The Chairman said a letter in support of the officer's recommendation had been received from Councillor Wattebot.

Councillor Foley said the Centre was in fact a facility for Uttlesford, not just for Thaxted, and provided a fantastic service. If the request were not granted, it would cause severe hardship.

RESOLVED that on this occasion, as the budget has already been allocated for 2008/09, Members agree to the Thaxted Centre for the Disabled receiving the full grant payment of £3,500 on the understanding that this is a one-off and does not set a precedent for the future.

CH12

## **HOUSING POLICY – GARAGE SITES DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

The report asked Members to consider the disposal of garage sites for affordable housing schemes at Newport, Wimbish and Chrishall. A letter from Newport Parish Council had been circulated to Members, requesting that one of the two sites identified in Newport be provided for car parking.

Councillor Redfern referred to the request from Newport Parish Council. She noted that housing needs in Newport were already being addressed to a significant extent. She said the village should be granted its request in view of the amount of affordable housing provision they had already made.

Officers explained that provision for disabled need in the District could be addressed by developing one of the sites in Newport. Councillor Redfern queried the feasibility of locating this type of accommodation in a village which had few links to services. Officers replied that Newport's facilities were very good for accessing services.

Councillor Bellingham-Smith agreed with Councillor Redfern. Parking was an important issue, and housing development in Newport would contribute to the number of vehicles.

The Chairman said this land was Housing Revenue Account land, which related to housing stock. The Acting Director of Development said the Council's corporate priorities were the delivery of affordable housing, and not to provide parking.

The Chairman suggested that as the request from Newport Parish Council had only recently been received, it was appropriate that officers hold further discussions with the Parish Council regarding the site at Newport.

### **RESOLVED**

- 1 That progress is noted by the Committee.
- 2 that sites at Wimbish and Chrishall and site 1 at Newport be made available for disposal to a Registered Social Landlord partner for affordable housing development subject to planning consent being obtained.
- 3 in principle, that land be handed over at nil or less than best consideration for affordable housing subject to full financial details being provided to Members in a future report which will detail the actual terms of the sale.



- 4 that officers carry out further discussions with Newport Parish Council regarding their request to take over site 2 at Frambury Lane, Newport to provide a village car park, and report to the September meeting.

### CH13 **AREA FORUMS**

The Community Partnerships Manager gave a verbal update on Area Forums. The first round of meetings this year had now taken place. Presentations had been given by agencies, and there were no particular matters to come forward to this Committee.

Councillor Sell said it was apparent from the Attendance Register that few Members had attended the Forum meetings. He was concerned that these were now formulaic and lacked structure. There was no theme to the evening, and not much public involvement. He was of the view that Members were voting with their feet.

Councillor Foley said he had received feedback that whilst the last meeting had been well put together, the South Area Forum was a talking shop, as no decisions were made.

### CH14 **AUDIT COMMISSION COMMUNITY HOUSING INSPECTION**

The report updated Members on the progress of the Action Plan put in place following the inspection of housing services by the Audit Commission in January 2008. The Head of Housing Services said the Audit Commission had indicated impressive progress had been made. Work to be carried out by the Housing Initiatives Working Group would address the areas of Choice Based Lettings and the allocations policy. A further self assessment would take place and the inspector would return in October or November to discuss the scope and date of the re-inspection.

RESOLVED to note the progress made in respect of the recommendations from the Audit Commission inspection of Community Housing Services.

### CH15 **REVIEW OF PEST CONTROL SERVICE**

A priority identified in the Environmental Health 2009/10 Divisional Plan was a review of the pest control service. The Director of Operations said as this area had potential for partnership, the Member Reference Group to be established would receive advice on this aspect from the Interim Change Manager.

The Reference Group would comprise five Members, three of whom would be Councillors Chamberlain, Miller and Redfern. The Liberal Democrat Group would inform Officers of their two nominees.

#### RESOLVED

- 1 that the Committee agree to establish a time limited Reference Group to undertake the review of Pest Control by October 2009
- 2 that the Committee nominate 5 Members to participate in the Task Group, this Group to be advised and guided by the following professionals: Head of Environmental Health, Principal Environmental Health Officer, pest control specialists as required
- 3 that the terms of reference included in the report be agreed.

CH16

#### **COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2009/10**

The Director of Operations presented a report of known issues to be submitted to the Committee for decision and the dates when Members could expect reports.

RESOLVED that the Committee approve the Work Programme 2009/10.

CH17

#### **TENANT FORUM MINUTES**

Daphne Cornell asked Members to note the concerns of Tenants set out in the Minutes, relating to potential outsourcing of Council services, and a report that the sale of the housing stock had been considered without the involvement of the Tenant Forum.

RESOLVED to note the Minutes of the meeting of the Tenant Forum held on 11 May 2009.

The meeting ended at 9.35 pm.

#### **Summary of statement by Rod Blacklock**

I am a resident of Holloway Crescent. I am disappointed with the way these *Community* Committee meetings have been misinformed via their Minutes. It is not right that the majority of residents in Leaden Roding are in favour of redevelopment. A poll has shown that 97% are against. Councillor Barker is quoted as saying she understands our concerns, but she is one of the instigators of this unwanted proposal, and has refused to support Leaden Roding residents in opposing these dreadful plans. If UDC are misled into giving away the land to developers who have time and again proven to be anti social and unreliable, it will be a disgrace. There are huge plots of land in and around Great Dunmow, where development has been overdone. Vast areas remain stagnant and void, Woodlands and Oaklands to name but two. What sense does it make to build more unwanted housing in an area with no pub or

Post Office, and only one bus per week? There are issues of capacity both at the school and regarding the sewage system. Please say no to development at Leaden Roding.

### **Summary of statement by Jo Waters, on behalf of the Concern Group.**

The Concern Group understands the need for the redevelopment of the sheltered housing, but not for Holloway Close. There are many reasons for this view, and we question the following: the need for forcing of residents from their homes; the sustainability of Swan's proposals; and the inappropriate level of development planned on land which forms the centre of our village. Our group represents a large and varied cross-section of the community, and a resounding 97% of households polled do not want this development.

We feel Swan has not kept its promise to keep the community updated; and we are doubtful of their future attitude especially if a significant parcel of land in the village centre be gifted free of charge to them by our local council.

The Group has been informed by Councillors and Officers that the sheltered housing in its present form does not provide for local housing needs as it contains 12 flats. Swan's proposals including building one bedroom flats within the plans for Holloway Close. The Group asks if one bedroom flats are required in Leaden Roding, why not refurbish the current block to provide this housing?

Swan have not shown respect for the community, and their attitude regarding the future quality of life for current tenants and homeowners in the area has been at times hostile or vague. Their attitude to social and parking issues that may arise from a significant infill of houses has been one of denial or ignorance.

We understand the need to provide affordable housing but question the Council's reasoning that the centre of Leaden Roding provides the solution. We object to the removal of residents from and development of Holloway Close. We ask the Committee to vote no to gifting the land in Holloway Close to Swan; no to the redevelopment of Holloway Close; no to the removal of home owners and tenants from Holloway Close; and to vote yes to the redevelopment of the sheltered housing block in Holloway Crescent.

Please support the local community in Leaden Roding and make the right decision for current and future residents.

### **Summary of statement by Dave Clayden**

I am the only owner-occupier in Holloway Close, and bought 30 Holloway Close privately, not from the Council. In 2008 we were invited to a meeting at the sheltered housing block and informed of development proposals. This came as a shock. At that meeting we were identified as "oh, you're those ones", and since then we have been treated in this fashion, having to fight to get information on Swan's proposals for our *home* and garden. The proposals are ludicrous – why demolish perfectly acceptable and updated dwellings to cram in these properties, with attendant overcrowding and parking problems?

We feel we have been badly treated by the Council and by Swan. It is difficult for us and for our solicitor to get answers. Initially we indicated we would be prepared to co-operate with the Council's proposals, but it now seems from our stance that the whole situation is being bullied through, with no appreciation of the stress and anxiety it is causing us. We have rights - these proposals cannot be forced on us. How would you feel if it were your home being discussed?

### **Summary of statement by Councillor Geoff Todd**

I am a Parish Councillor at Leaden Roding. The Parish Council feels it has not been kept informed about the development proposals, and has been kept in the dark. On many occasions our Clerk has requested plans but to no avail, and it was only last week that she was sent them. We are not in agreement with the volume of housing proposed, and certainly not flats, as stated at various Parish meetings. We do not want a 'sink estate'. There are no facilities for young people, and very limited bus services. Car parking could be worse than at present, and we cannot rely on public transport here.

We are concerned at the effect the proposals would have on residents' lives. Our village school has not been approached with regard to this development. Neither the local water or sewage company have any record of an approach from the developers. However, at the Village Hall meeting we were told both school and services were aware of this proposal. Swan has made no communication by letter with tenants in Holloway Close. We would have liked more support from our ward Member, and feel our views are not being considered. We feel the developers are not listening, Uttlesford are not listening, and the development is a foregone conclusion. This is not right or reasonable.