

COUNCIL MEETING held at 7.30 pm at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 9 OCTOBER 2007

Present:- Councillor C M Dean – Chairman.
Councillors E Abrahams, K R Artus, S Barker, E L Bellingham-Smith, C Cant, R H Chamberlain, R Chambers, J Cheetham, R Clover, A Dean, C Down, K L Eden, M Gayler, E Godwin, E Gower, S J Howell, J E Hudson, D M Jones, A Ketteridge, R M Lemon, J Loughlin, H J Mason, J Menell, M Miller, D Morson, D G Perry, H S Rolfe, D J Sadler, J Salmon, S Schneider, G Sell, C C Smith, A D Walters, A M Wattebot, L A Wells and A C Yarwood.

Officers in attendance:- A Bovaird, M Brean, J Mitchell, C Nicholson, C Oliva, M T Purkiss and A Webb.

C38 PUBLIC SPEAKING

Prior to the meeting statements were made by eight members of the public and a summary of the statements is attached to these Minutes.

C39 MEMBERS' QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

Councillor Yarwood said that he understood that the Council would not now have the opportunity to discuss the Local Development Framework at this meeting and asked when Members would be able to discuss this matter again. Councillor Ketteridge said that the Local Development Framework item on the agenda only stood if it was referred to the Council by the Scrutiny Committee. This had not happened and the next opportunity to discuss the matter would be at the Environment Committee on 30 October 2007.

Councillor Morson passed copies of petitions to Councillor Ketteridge concerning the option in the LDF for 3,000 houses to be built at Elsenham. He said that the petitions contained 568 signatures with a further 53 letters opposing the fourth option. He asked if he could have a specific and unequivocal explanation as to how the fourth option had originated. He said that, given the amount of hostility to option four, the lack of preparedness in bringing forward this option and the constitutional anomalies at the Scrutiny Committee, he asked if the Council could now move forward and remove option four.

Councillor Godwin asked that the Local Development Framework should be raised at the Member Workshop day. She also asked for details of the cost of running Area Panels and asked what could be done to stop the late e-mail of committee reports and last minute turnarounds.

Councillor Sell asked the Leader if he could explain how he saw the role of Scrutiny in Uttlesford and asked whether he accepted the view of the Audit Commission that Scrutiny was an essential component of successful and effective Councils.

Councillor Chambers explained that the decision on the Local Development Framework had been very difficult. He asked the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee to state how he saw the role of Scrutiny and to state what the Liberal Democrat preferred option was on the Local Development Framework. Councillor Yarwood replied that the role of Scrutiny was not to make decisions on the Local Development Framework, but to scrutinise the decisions of other committees.

Councillor A Dean asked the Leader whether, prior to the decision to consider the calling in of the Environment Committee's decision, he had 'whipped', instructed, encouraged or otherwise persuaded his Members into opposing the call in.

Councillor Gayler said that the Leader had raised constitutional issues at the Scrutiny Committee meeting and had given an undertaking that the Local Development Framework would be discussed at this meeting. He asked whether he now agreed that he had misled people.

The Leader said that the process in dealing with the Local Development Framework had been totally open and transparent. He had made a detailed statement at the South West Area Panel Meeting which was included in the Minutes and he read extracts from this which explained how the decision to put forward the fourth option had evolved. He did not agree that there had been constitutional anomalies at the Scrutiny Committee. That Committee had to decide whether the previous decision had been made in an inappropriate way and concluded that it had not. He said that he would be happy for the matter to be discussed at the Member Workshop day and pointed out that the previous workshop had been cancelled due to the lack of Members stating that they would attend. He stated that he had not 'whipped' Members of his group into any course of action at the Scrutiny Committee. He accepted that he had stated at the Scrutiny Meeting that he would bring forward a proposal to the Council Meeting, but following further dialogue with officers and Go-East it was clear that it was not advisable to have all four options as the preferred option. He reiterated that the current stage was only part of the consultation process and he had asked officers to comprehensively research all options in the light of responses to the consultation process.

Councillor Morson questioned why Elsenham had been chosen as the preferred option and asked that Option 4 should be removed to create consensus amongst Members.

Councillor Godwin again asked about the cost of Area Panels and Councillor Chambers said that he would provide her with a written reply.

Councillor A Dean asked the Leader whether he would be prepared to meet with him to discuss possible amendments to the Constitution to avoid problems in the future. The Leader said that the issue could be discussed at the Constitution Task Group meeting on 19 October.

Councillor Rolfe said that consultation on the LDF would continue and expand for six weeks and no decision would be made until Spring 2008. There would then follow a further period of consultation and an examination in public with

an Inspector. He said that he had asked officers, as part of further research to look at other options which come forward.

Councillor Cheetham asked why members of other parishes had been barred from attending the meeting of the South West Area Panel which had been held at Elsenham. The Chief Executive confirmed that the meeting had been open to anyone, but the fire safety limit had been reached.

Councillor Loughlin referred to the use of agency staff and the Chief Executive confirmed that this would be dealt with in his report later in the meeting. In response to a question from the Leader earlier in the meeting, Councillor Yarwood said that the Liberal Democrat Group wanted more consultation and understanding of all options on the LDF to enable a robust decision to be made.

C40 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S Anjum, M Foley, E W Hicks, T P Knight, J A Redfern, R D Sherer and P A Wilcock.

C41 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Chambers declared an interest as a member of Essex County Council and Chairman of the Essex Police Authority.

C42 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 31 July 2007 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

C43 **BUSINESS ARISING**

(i) Minute C27 – West Essex Primary Care Trust

Councillor Menell asked whether there had been any progress concerning appointments to the West Essex Primary Care Trust. The Chief Executive said that he had met with the Chief Executive of the Trust who had confirmed that membership was laid down by the Secretary of State. The Chief Executive of the Trust had said that he would be willing to speak to Members to discuss improvements to the relationship between the Trust and the Council. Councillor Cheetham suggested that representations should be made to the Secretary of State as the role of local authorities had been devalued. Councillor Morson said that the role of the three district council's looking informally at decisions should be given greater recognition and the Chief Executive said that he would discuss this matter with the Trust.

(ii) Minute C29 – Leader's Communications

Councillor A Dean referred to the comments of the Leader at the last meeting that 'the Administration believed in putting people, both our customers and our

employees' first so in all our actions we will try to involve local people in order that we can take into account their views and preferences'. He asked whether in view of the current difficulties, the approach to public involvement and consultation would be reviewed.

(iii) Minute C35 – Corporate Plan

Councillor A Dean asked for an explanation as to why this matter would not be discussed at the meeting. The Chief Executive said that the item had been withdrawn as the draft needed further work.

C44

CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Chairman said that since the last meeting she had attended the High Sheriff's lunch and fellow mayors and chairmen had attended an event at Bridge End Gardens and the Museum which had been very well received and wine from the Felsted Vineyard had been served. The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors had also launched its awards programme in Bridge End Gardens and the Vice-Chairman would be attending the finals of the current year's event where the Bridge End Gardens Project was in the running for an award. She said that she had also attended the Princes Trust Awards and had been humbled by the achievements of young people. Other events attended included the Pearlies Harvest Festival and the High Sheriff's Justice Service at Chelmsford Cathedral.

She said that she was continuing her work with bag painting in primary schools in the district. The walks around the district with other councillors had gone well and only one further walk was to be completed. She said that she had invited Members to the 'Big Draw Weekend' at Easton Lodge Gardens on Sunday and hoped that Members would support this event. The next event would be a quiz night on 26 October. She concluded by offering congratulations to former Councillor Mike Hibbs and the former mayor of Saffron Walden, Hilary Shibata, who were married last week.

C45

LEADER'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Leader said that it had been the priority of the Administration to deal with the financial situation, but the matter had been more severe than anticipated. He thanked officers for their co-operation and understanding during this difficult time. He said that one of the options was to examine the value of partnerships and exploratory meetings had been held with a number of nearby local authorities and all opportunities would be looked at.

He said that the Post Office had announced that the Post Offices at Little Hallingbury, Mole Hill Green, Quendon and Rowntree Way, Saffron Walden were included in their proposals for closure. He concluded that on a recent visit to Carver Barracks he had been made aware of a sapper who had lost a leg in Afghanistan and the barracks were fundraising to help with his rehabilitation. He asked Members if they would be prepared to donate towards this and a collection was taken.

C46

MATTERS ARISING FROM COMMITTEES

(i) Community Committee – Minute C20 – Contribution Fund Scheme Grant and other grant requests

Members noted this matter for consideration at future budget meetings.

(ii) Finance and Administration Committee – Minute FA20 - Elizabeth Way Culvert

Members were advised that at the last meeting of the Finance and Administration Committee, Members had been advised that an Environment Agency survey of the Council owned culvert at Elizabeth Way and behind Radwinter Road, Saffron Walden had shown the need to carry out urgent work on the structure.

RESOLVED that the request of the Finance and Administration Committee to add £270,000 to the capital programme for 2007/08 to allow reconstruction of the failed section of culvert as a matter of urgency and necessary maintenance of the other sections of the culvert as appropriate be approved.

C47

GENERAL FUND BUDGET

The Chief Executive apologised for the late circulation of this report and said that he would ask Members to consider a further report during the confidential part of the meeting.

In his report, the Chief Executive reminded Members of the underlying financial problems and the current situation regarding the Director of Resources.

He said that, in the absence of the Director of Resources, Adrian Webb (Head of IT and OR) had been appointed the Council's Acting Chief Finance Officer and had been carrying out the duties of the Section 151 Officer. He was being supported by David Bradley, an external consultant, who was acting as Head of Finance in the continued absence of the substantive post holder.

The Acting Chief Finance Officer had been asked to prioritise

- Stabilising the staffing in the Finance team
- Ensuring that they were capable of providing the right support to Members and managers in carrying out their respective roles
- Ensuring, in accordance with the requirements of both Finance and Administration and the Performance Select Committees, the production of regular and robust financial reports
- Identifying, with the support of managers across the organisation, potential savings in the current financial year and in ongoing running costs.

The Chief Executive said that the budgets had been revisited and firm savings proposals totalling £126,000 had been achieved. The report outlined the work being undertaken regarding the approval of purchase orders and the work of the organisational reengineering team. He said that a number of agency staff and staff on temporary contracts had been released and a number of vacancies were being held in the organisation and a number of requests to fill posts had been refused. He said that a cautious estimate of the savings so far achieved by these methods was £50,000.

The Chief Executive said that staff had been told that there might be the possibility of voluntary redundancies or early retirement and he gave details of the response to this and the timescale in dealing with requests. The report asked Members to authorise in advance the Strategic Management Board to agree these requests, subject to the following:

- That the total drawn on balances to fund redundancies should not exceed £300,000.
- That the repayment period for redundancies, taken altogether, should not exceed 18 months, including allowing for any knock on effects in terms of reorganisation to cover the work of the departing individuals.
- If SMB wished to recommend that there be any variation in budget restrictions, it would be necessary to seek the authority of the Finance and Administration Committee on 15 November 2007.
- In any case, the redundancies, their overall costs and savings achieved would be reported to the Finance and Administration Committee at its November meeting.

It was estimated that it might be possible, by this process, to achieve savings this year of approximately £75,000, but this would depend on the exact numbers and nature of the posts being released by this mechanism and assumed that those departing would do so on 31 December 2007.

The report stated that the Council would continue to bear down on expenditure levels and would be examining a number of other options for savings. It was also clear that there was going to be a need to achieve further savings in the Council's ongoing running costs as well as in this year's expenditure. The Chief Executive said that it was important that spending decisions that were taken in this year's circumstances did not cause greater than necessary difficulty in future years.

In order to take the necessary steps towards stability and to ensure that the resources of the organisation were deployed in accordance with the priorities of the Council, the following approach was being proposed:

- a further review (and reduction) in the senior management structure detailed further below;
- the identification of savings targets based on the council's priorities, the need to ensure service continuity, with Heads of Division and budget managers being required to develop proposals for service delivery and staffing structures to meet these targets;

- once the staffing requirements have been identified, it would be apparent from a matching exercise to current roles that some jobs would be at risk in this process, while others will change significantly. However, most jobs would continue broadly unchanged.
- that, subject to further discussion with staff and Unison, a protocol for an accelerated redeployment of staff to ensure that those whose jobs were at risk could be placed into 'secure' roles where vacancies exist and where the skills and capabilities of the individual allows.

In relation to senior management restructuring the report proposed that the Council moved towards the following structure at SMB level:

- A chief executive
- Three directors, with the following remits:
 - Development, the Environment and the Economy;
 - Operational Services, including the U Connect customer centre and other front line service delivery
 - Central services – including administration, finance, HR, IT, OR, performance, partnerships and the transformation agenda;
- An Assistant Chief Executive/Monitoring Officer
- A Chief Finance Officer/Section 151 Officer who – for line management purposes will sit within the Central Services directorate, but will be part of SMB in their own right in order to be able to exercise the full authority of the s.151 role.

The Chief Executive concluded that this period of difficulty had been a real challenge to the staff of the Council. He said that many of them had reported feelings of bewilderment and distress at the difficulties the Council found itself in, particularly when none of the responsibility for the situation could be attributed to their own performance, which had remained high throughout. He said that the next few months would continue to be difficult, but on the evidence so far the Council was in the fortunate position of being able to count on the commitment, effort and creativity of its staff in addressing these issues. He said that staff meetings in recent weeks had been challenging and critical, but also constructive. He concluded that it was appropriate to record the gratitude of senior management for the approach staff had taken and he hoped that Members would feel able to associate themselves with that expression of thanks. Members endorsed these comments.

Councillor Loughlin referred to the position regarding agency staff and said that if they had been taken on for a specific need and had now been released, there must have been a valid reason for engaging them and asked what steps were in place to assist existing staff with the additional pressures created by this. Councillor Godwin said that all Members had sympathy and concern for the Council's staff at this difficult time and appreciated what they were doing she said that there was a need to bring the period of uncertainty to an end and hoped that the dates provided in the report were realistic. She also

commented that regular reports to Members were essential. The Chief Executive replied that there was a need to move quickly with the staffing issues and a need to rule out compulsory redundancies if this was possible. He felt that the dates provided in the report were achievable and he was working on processes for regular reports at least on a monthly basis.

Councillor A Dean reiterated that Councillors should work together to sort out these problems in a positive way. He asked whether it was possible to save £75,000 in three months and asked how the remaining deficit could be addressed. The Chief Executive confirmed that the £75,000 was for a quarter leading to a saving of £300,000 in a full year. He said that it was important to address the underlying issues which had led to the deficit. It was unfortunate that the reporting was incorrect and mistakes had come to light far too late. He said that the Council needed to go back to the golden rule that expenditure should be over estimated and income under estimated.

Councillor Menell said that this was a shocking report and the fact that so many staff were interested in voluntary redundancy showed how unhappy they were. The Chief Executive said that he appreciated the feelings of staff and this needed to be addressed and steps taken to improve morale including better communication and more appreciation of the value of staff.

Councillor Rolfe said that the support of staff was invaluable and said that some Members should not try to turn these matters into political issues. He said that this was not the first year that the Council had financial problems. It had been known for some time that the finances were in a mess and the reserves had been damaged to overcome the spending problems. He said that Uttlesford was a small council and must think laterally to see how it could improve services and this may be in partnership. He concluded that the deficit this year was £1.1m and his committee had asked that this be halved and more work would be needed to achieve this than was outlined in the report.

Councillor Yarwood asked for evidence of what system of financial control would be put in place to rectify the situation.

Councillor Chamberlain said that it was unfortunate that the report was circulated late and had not given Members an opportunity to digest the content. He was concerned at the comments which had been made by the Unison representative and said that the Council needed to keep in close contact with the union. He continued that morale was very low and must be addressed. The Council needed to concentrate on front line services and these should not be diluted. He asked whether the Section 151 Officer would be a Director by another name. He concluded that a happy organisation did not normally generate many people coming forward to leave voluntarily.

Councillor Loughlin questioned whether the decision on Option 4 had been rushed through with the Planning Delivery Grant in mind. The Director of Development confirmed that the principal concern was not to be left in a policy vacuum.

Councillor Sell asked what could be done to restore confidence with the Council's other stakeholders. Page 8

The Chief Executive then replied to a number of the above questions. He confirmed that the Section 151 Officer would not be a Director, but would attend meetings of the Strategic Management Board. He accepted that the savings identified at this stage were not enough and he was hoping to move towards the target which had been set. He concluded that openness was the key to restoring confidence, both internally and externally.

The Leader said that whilst mistakes had compounded the situation, there had been overspends in 2005/06 and 2006/07 and as a consequence reserves were not now available to address the current situation. He said the Council was working hard to put things right and aimed to have a balanced budget by next year. He concluded that the Council could not spend money that was not budgeted for and this would be the practice in future.

Councillor Gayler asked what resources would be in place to enable the financial management staff to achieve what needed to be done. He accepted that there may have been some over optimistic assumptions in the past and said that a good standing of financial reporting was essential to enable action to be taken where necessary. He concluded that the finance section must be fully staffed to provide the reports that Members needed. The Chief Executive said that strategic financial advice must be strong and robust and the appointments which had been made would help achieve this. He said that priority was being given to regularising some of the positions in the Finance section and interim arrangements in some cases might be the only option.

Councillor Artus stated that at the Council Tax meeting the Director of Resources had claimed that Council Tax would need to rise by 13% to meet the planned level of expenditure. However, an increase of only 2% was agreed. Councillor Rolfe questioned the lack of action taken by the Operations and Performance Select Committees during the previous Administration.

Councillor A Dean said that clear political leadership and clear plans were needed, but expressed his concern that no Corporate Plan had yet been approved.

Councillor Chambers said that he had been concerned by the comments made by Unison which showed that the staff had grave concerns. He outlined the four priorities of the Administration which were putting the financial situation on a sound footing, putting people first, caring for the environment and looking at partnerships. He outlined progress with these and said that careful planning, good strategy, sound financial management, clear leadership and stability would provide the way forward. He said that everything possible should be done to avoid compulsory redundancies. He concluded that staff used to enjoy their work and the work environment and hoped that the Council could return to this position.

RESOLVED that

- 1 progress on the savings exercise is noted, and that managers and staff are asked to continue to bear down on current expenditure;

- 2 the areas of exploration of further savings are also noted;
- 3 the proposals for agreeing voluntary redundancies be approved;
- 4 the proposed restructuring of the Strategic Management Board be agreed, subject to further consultation on process and timescales with those involved;
- 5 Members note that further reports on the actions being taken will be brought to future meetings of the Council, Finance and Administration Committee and the Performance Select Committee;
- 6 Members formally record their thanks to the staff of the organisation for their continued commitment to service delivery in the district and for their constructive approach to the difficulties the Council currently faces.

C48 CORPORATE PLAN 2007/09

It was noted that this report had been withdrawn.

C49 LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

It was noted that as this matter had not been called in the item was not open for discussion.

C50 NOTICE OF MOTION

Members considered the following Notice of Motion which had been proposed by Councillor D Jones and duly seconded:

“This Council resolve that with immediate effect the Union Flag shall be flown from the Council flagstaff throughout the day, on all days that the Council is open for business and on all other designated ‘flag’ days”.

Councillor Gayler then moved the following amendment which was duly seconded:

“This Council is proud of its country and proud of the Uttlesford District.

The Council therefore affirms that the Council should fly both the Union flag and the Uttlesford District Council flag.

Furthermore the Council is committed to campaigning to protect our rural area and fight climate change, and will therefore acquire and fly a flag declaring ‘Uttlesford Says NO to more runways at Stansted”.

On being put to the vote the amendment was lost and the Motion as proposed by Councillor D Jones was carried.

C51 **ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS**

The Chairman agreed to the urgent consideration of this item as the meeting referred to occurred before the next meeting of the Council.

Councillor Menell said that the meeting of the North Area Panel on 18 October would include an open session with Councillor Hume and others from Essex Highways and she asked Members to submit any questions they might wish to raise prior to the meeting.

C52 **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

RESOLVED that Under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded for the consideration of the following item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of Exempt Information as defined in paragraph 1 of part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

C53 **SEVERANCE**

Members considered a report concerning the Director of Resources.

RESOLVED that the Council note and agree the main terms of the draft Compromise Agreement which had been reached regarding the departure of the Director of Resources from the Council's employment.

That the Chief Executive and Deputy Monitoring Officer be granted delegated authority to finalise the agreement subject, if necessary, to further consultation with the Members' Discipline Panel constituted for these purposes.

Councillors Menell and Walters abstained from voting

The meeting ended at 10.45 pm.

COUNCIL MEETING – 9 OCTOBER 2007

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

(i) Mr Segar – Elsenham

Mr Segar said that the original reports had included nine options, but only three were on the agenda to the Environment Committee with the fourth option being submitted at the meeting with little detail. He contested that this could not be a serious option without proper analysis having taken place. He said that one option was to distribute the housing over key areas and he asked what assessment had been made of this. He considered that the choice of the fourth option was naive and said that the village barely coped with the current rail and road pressures and had poor access to the new A120 and M11. He said that the proposal did not comply with criteria and a site off the new A120 was a better option. He concluded that it was our community and the community felt let down.

(ii) Mr Franklin – Elsenham Parish Council

Mr Franklin said that Elsenham had inadequate infrastructure and no adequate roads. He referred to the increase in the population of the village over recent years and said that he had given evidence at the Inquiry into 400 new homes, where this proposal had been refused due to the inadequacy of the roads, particularly, Grove Hill. He said that cosmetic improvements had been carried out, but these had been overtaken by the increase in traffic and saturation point had already been reached. He said that serious flawed assumptions had been made and there were anomalies as no reference had been made to either Grove Hill or Chapel Hill in the report. He said that the proposal would result in more cars, more casualties, more congestion and more carnage.

(iii) Julia Smith

Julia Smith said that she was angry and upset at the way the previous committees had conducted themselves and she hoped that all Members would now listen to residents. She claimed that Councillors had ignored established procedures to enable them to consider Option 4. The proposal had not been properly investigated. She said that whilst she recognised the need for some development there had been no proper assessment of the likely impact of the development at Elsenham prior to the decision being made. She said that the proposals were ill considered and the area would become a target for unrestrained growth leading to a new town. She concluded that she was shocked by the actions of Councillors and officers and asked that officers should be instructed to carry out a proper review of the proposals.

(iv) Mr Nicholson – Henham Parish Council

Mr Nicholson said:

I am the Chairman of Henham Parish Council and in that capacity as an Uttlesford resident I attended the recent UDC South West Area Panel meeting at Elsenham on 2 October and the Scrutiny Committee held here on the 3rd. I asked a question at the Panel meeting and I was able to address the Scrutiny Committee making a number of observations which I will not repeat here as a copy of my speech is on file.

Hopefully the representations made by our parish and district councillors and residents at the various meetings held in the last two weeks have been conveyed to you all on Council in a neutral non-party political form.

That would be the correct way. But I have to say that at the last two meetings that is not the manner in which many reasonable questions were addressed.

Put simply some 500 individuals representing probably a thousand or more residents have heard the deliberations of influential groupings and committees of our district council first hand and probably for the first time.

And what they heard must have severely tested their faith in the democratic process. They heard that the Leader of the Uttlesford Conservative Group had as an ex-officio attendee presented a case for the now infamous Option 4 to the Environment Committee without having given the Independent Group more than two minutes notice and the Lib Dem Group half an hour to think about it.

And they heard that Option 4 naming Elsenham was subsequently chosen as the recommended option on the casting vote of the Committee Chairman, also a Conservative.

I am a lifelong member of the Conservative Party, knowing a little, and voting for Sir Alan Haselhurst and I first visited the Commons when I was a teenager under the auspices of my Conservative MP for Chingford – some 50 plus years ago.

But after the Area Panel meeting last week I went home very much with the intention of resigning the next day and writing to Museum Street and to Sir Alan advising of the arrogance and intransigence of our party's representatives that evening.

Their inability or unwillingness to answer many questions and their apparent lack of proper briefing by their officers was embarrassing.

I didn't resign, but that obtrusiveness essentially carried through to the subsequent Conservative representation at the Scrutiny Committee meeting. This was even to the extent that Councillor Chambers had to remind us as he was elected it was up to him to decide what was right for us.

I felt extremely concerned at the apparent inability of our council members of all persuasions to work together on matters of this importance.

There is a palpable undercurrent of dislike between various councillors which precludes sensible, mature consideration of problems such as this which

cross party lines, and which will severely affect the lives of so many Uttlesford residents.

We know you are under pressure but we need clear thinking and commonsense here and I return to my now thrice repeated request that the Leaders of the Groups representing our District Council together visit the Secretary of State with if necessary a 'Go East' representative, and with conviction request recognition that Uttlesford is a unique case with its particular problems regarding the development of Stansted Airport.

It is surely the case that until we know what's happening there we cannot sensibly consider where these extra houses will go.

It is not acceptable to hide behind John Mitchell's statement last week that higher authorities will not listen to that argument.

Have we actually, seriously made that proposal to them?

I hereby ask the Council through the Chairman, not an officer, to please answer that question this evening.

We are, as I see it councillors, and as I am advised, just not prepared enough in every way to make these momentous decisions. I am certainly not an expert in planning matters but I know there is more to planning than saying 'oh – that should do – there's a road and railway nearby!'

The whole decision making process to date is undoubtedly fundamentally flawed. I have to say also that that process has not been helped certainly in the public eye by the aggressive and presumptuous literature and correspondence put out by the Fairfield Partnership. With their 'vision for Elsenham' anybody reading it would think it was their idea!

I have to say without wishing to be dramatic that we in Henham will fight and will join with others in fighting any decision you make that we consider to be expedient and unconstitutional.

We have already provisionally briefed planning and constitutional lawyers and are currently considering the selection of our planning consultant.

If necessary, we will not hesitate to use the offices of the Local Authority Ombudsman and to invoke the Freedom of Information Act.

We have the funds available to obtain the very best advice.

I will close by asking, please councillors do not consider putting any of these options forward until further in depth study has been undertaken and published of their respective impacts on the community in short, medium and long term. Consider other options in Uttlesford.

But firstly please talk to 'Go East' and to the Government Department and the Minister and persuade them to concede that Uttlesford is a unique case and must be allowed adequate time for these life changing decisions to be thought through.

(v)

Trudi Hughes – Dunmow Town Council

Trudi Hughes made the following statement:

I am Trudi Hughes, Chartered Surveyor and Great Dunmow Town Councillor. I'm here to put forward the views of members of Dunmow Town Council in relation to the Core Strategy – the options for growth.

We are aware that four growth options have been recently tabled.

(1 includes 2,130 homes for Dunmow, 2 & 3 include 1,000 homes for Dunmow; option 4 includes 750 split between Saffron Walden, Dunmow and Stansted).

Increasing development pressures in the area make it a priority for the Council to produce robust Development Plan Documents and we support that.

We know that the Government are committed to housing growth and that Uttlesford has agreed to take the housing numbers. We are not here to debate the numbers, we are here to comment on what basis 'preferred options need to be predicated.

- The Town Council appeared at the East of England Examination in public where the following points emerged:
- Housing/employment growth should be focussed around key growth areas – Cambridge and Harlow.
- Housing and jobs should wherever possible be co-located, and both must be close to and maximise the use of sustainable modes of transport.
- Growth proposals that promote further use of the car are not sustainable.
- We saw off the threat of 2,650 homes being earmarked for Dunmow that had been specified in the original draft.
- The Inspector agreed with use that the A120 is merely a road – not a driver for development.
- Unusually the Inspector questioned your official representative on Woodlands and Oakwood Park – two recent developments the planning of which is considered to represent very poor practice, where the scale and design of the houses do not relate to local vernacular building traditions; but most significant of all, Woodlands Park has no green open public spaces for residents; no community facilities; no 'sense of arrival'.

These are examples of 'developer led planning'.

This type of development does not add to the quality of anyone's life.

It is now time for 'Council-led planning!'

To turn to the matter of the options.

The Government sets out tests to assess whether or not a development plan document is 'sound'. If it is deemed not to be sound at an examination by the Planning Inspectorate, it will be thrown out and the Council will have to start again.

Dunmow Town Council has already provided detailed commentary on the core strategy. We believe that the draft which came out for consultation at the beginning of this year is at high risk of failing the tests of 'soundness'.

With regard to the options, the Government usually sets out not only the process, but key components in decision making to determine viable 'options' for growth. Key issues are:

- Is it clear that Uttlesford have considered all reasonable options and alternatives?
- Are the assumptions set out clearly and supported by evidence?
- Does the evidence clearly support the policies in the core strategy?
- Is the evidence robust and credible, ie has it been prepared in accordance with national policy and good practice guidance?
- Where a balance has been struck in decision making between competing alternatives – is it clear how those decisions have been taken?

The answer to all of these questions is no!

So it is therefore inappropriate to ask members and the public to make a choice as to where the houses are to be located based on the information currently on the table.

We understand and support UDC's wish to secure approval to a credible and robust Core Strategy including the preferred options for growth. It is in all our interests to secure this.

But it must be done in the correct way otherwise it will fail and the Council will lose time we can ill afford to lose.

Dunmow Town Council reiterates its wish to become more fully involved in the consultation process.

We therefore recommend that Elected Members defer making a decision on the growth options until officers can demonstrate that they have fully and

robustly complied with all relevant Government and regional government policies in this regard.

Uttlesford's environment is special – it is in all our interest to keep it that way.

(vi) **P Johnson**

Mr Johnson made the following statement:

In my statement on behalf of Elsenham and its Parish Council to the recent Scrutiny Committee meeting, I stated that the published Minutes of the Environment Committee's meeting clearly showed that the introduction of a fourth option, namely 3,000 dwellings in a new settlement to the north east of Elsenham, was without the prior notification to members, was without consultation, and not tabled on the agenda.

I also drew to the member's attention, the Council's Constitution, Article 15 – Decision Making, which lays down the five key principles governing all decisions of the Council. It remains my contention that the manner in which a fourth option was introduced as in breach of two of the decision-making principles, namely:

“due consultation and the taking of professional advice”; and
“the presumption in favour of openness”

I again submit that neither of these principles were applied when the motion to add the fourth option, and to identify Option 4 as the Council's preferred option, was debated and voted upon.

Having attended the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, I contend that the proper function and purpose of that committee, namely, to examine the processes that led to the decision being taken, was effectively over-ridden by the Administration. In its place, the majority group on the Council clearly demonstrated its desire, not to participate in the proper calling in and scrutiny procedures, but rather to pursue its chosen strategy, namely, the inclusion of Option 4.

During the Scrutiny meeting, Councillor Ketteridge proposed that all four growth options would be the Council's Preferred Options, and stated that he was prepared to put a motion to Full Council and would ensure that all options would be considered equally. In the aftermath of this proposal, the motion to refer the Environment Committee's decision to Full Council was lost, causing, it appears, placing the entire issue of the decision into limbo. In addition, the Council now finds itself in a position whereby extraordinary procedures must now be adopted, in order for the matter to be discussed by this meeting.

I respectfully submit that the manner in which the Environment and Scrutiny Committee meetings were allowed to proceed has resulted in a number of flawed processes and procedures taking place, and therefore any decision to include Option 4, must be regarded as unsafe.

It is my belief that the poor handling of this extremely important and sensitive local issue by the Council has led to the reputation of Uttlesford District Council being tarnished in the eyes of the local communities.

I ask, therefore, on behalf of Elsenham and Henham and the other local communities, that all members of the Council now show a willingness and determination to come together and demonstrate in a very clear way, that when determining the strategy for the future growth options, the decision will be taken after careful and proper consideration, in an open and transparent manner, without any pre-conceptions.

In this way, it may be hoped that the Government's demand for new house provision can be effectively achieved, whilst still minimising the impact of such future developments upon our existing local communities.

(vii) **Mr Hughes – Henham**

Mr Hughes said that the actions of the Saffron Walden Conservatives had brought the reputation of the Council into disrepute. He agreed that it was better for a new development with railway access, but opposed a bolt on solution to the village of Elsenham. He appreciated that people needed affordable housing, but the fourth option did not have adequate infrastructure and did not appear to have been properly considered. He suggested that a site off the new A120 in the Takeley area would be preferable and it was possible for the railway link to be reopened. He said that the Leader had given an undertaking that all four options would be considered again, but this had not happened. He would like to scrap all "bolt on" options and move to a new freestanding development with rail access or to an option at Saffron Walden.

(viii) **Val Rogacs – Unison**

Val Rogacs said that it is a pity that the issue of the development at Elsenham, important though it is and obviously affecting such a large number of people, seems to be overshadowing the vital issue of the Council's financial situation, something far reaching which affects every single resident in this District.

The majority of staff working for Uttlesford are not only employees, but also residents in the District, which makes them council tax payers and your electorate!

Staff feel appalled at the situation we now find ourselves in and totally let down by senior management.

It is fair to say that staff have lost confidence and trust in the current management to get us out of a situation which, by and large, they have caused.

Staff have over the past 3 years supported, often despite serious misgivings, changes to our working practices, our reporting structures and our management structures. We have been told that these were all going to make savings, although it was hard to see how. Spending appeared to be out

of control; a job evaluation scheme was brought in without consultation with the union; but at what expense; purely for directors and heads of division; which resulted in their salaries being increased massively at a time when it was becoming increasingly obvious to us all that the money was running out.

Even though management was scaled down towards the end of last year, this was only at the expense of massive redundancy and pension payouts. Compare this to a clerical worker with over 20 years service to this Council who retired earlier this year at an age where they were entitled to do so, but before age 65 when they could access a full pension. That person had asked for just a few added years on the pension, but the decision was deferred time and again on the grounds that there was no money, until that person eventually gave up and retired with an actual reduction in their pension. **Who says there isn't one law for the rich and one for the poor!!**

Staff do not ask for preferential treatment, but fairness and equity go a long way and there has been precious little of that recently. Whilst we have seen management salaries increase by something in the region of 25% in just over 3 years we have certainly not witnessed efficiency savings to match this; yet over the same period, staff have suffered below inflation pay increases which actually results in pay cuts for them.

Some members of management team, even as we speak, are still away for days at a time at conferences or seminars, yet staff are having to get permission a week to 10 days in advance to carry out the most basic functions if there is a cost involved. It seems to be again a matter of "don't do as I do, do as I say", not an attitude to provoke loyalty and yet staff have proved their loyalty to this authority time and again, providing the highest level of service to the community often despite, not because of, the management.

Staff are looking for answers to some very fundamental questions:

- Why did SMB and Heads of Division not take more immediate action to find savings when these were identified as being necessary by the Director of Resources?
- When are SMB going to admit collective responsibility for this outrageous situation? Indeed why are they still in post when they are clearly responsible for our current predicament.
- What assurances can staff be given that our employment and the services we provide will be safeguarded and there will be no "golden handshakes" for a favoured few.

Staff and the community need answers to these questions if trust and confidence is to be regained.

Thank you.