

COUNCIL MEETING HELD at 7.30 pm at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 11 DECEMBER 2007

Present:- Councillor C M Dean – Chairman.
Councillors E C 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 L Foley, M Gayler, E J Godwin, E Gower, E W Hicks, S J Howell, J E Hudson, D M Jones, A Ketteridge, T P Knight, R M Lemon, J Loughlin, H J Mason, J E Menell, D J Morson, D G Perry, J A Redfern, H S Rolfe, D J Sadler, S Schneider, G Sell, R D Sherer, A D Walters, A M Wattebot, L A Wells, P Wilcock and A C Yarwood

Officers in attendance:- A Bovaird, R Auty, D Bradley, M Brean, D Burrige, R Millership, J Mitchell, M Perry, R Procter, J Snares, P Snow and A Webb.

C54 YOUNG PEOPLE OF THE YEAR AWARDS

Before the public speaking session, the Chairman congratulated three participants in the Young People of the Year Awards who were former or existing pupils at Saffron Walden County High School.

Paul Brown had been instrumental in establishing the skatepark in Saffron Walden and had raised most of the funding for this project over a period of six years. Charlie Watts had been involved in the provision of two basketball courts at the County High School by obtaining the necessary funding from a variety of sources.

Kerry Seddon was presented with her award in person. She had been involved with ResCU (now ACCURO) and had been responsible for establishing a group in Great Dunmow to help children with learning difficulties and behavioural problems. Her actions had inspired a number of people to act as volunteers at the Centre and she was now studying for a social work qualification.

C55 PUBLIC SPEAKING

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

C56 MEMBERS' QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

Councillor Morson asked for clarification about the number of homes that would be provided at Eisenham under Option 4 in the Core Strategy Preferred Options document. Although the document referred to 3,000 homes at this location, he understood that a new eco settlement needed four to five thousand homes to be viable and officers had said that a sustainable community would require 10,000 new homes. In addition, Fairfield Partnership had indicated that they could accommodate 7,000 homes at this

location. He said that if the Council was consulting on more than 3,000 homes at this location, it should say so. He also questioned whether the new settlement envisaged under Option 4 would be linked to an existing settlement or was intended to be a stand alone development. All the indications were that if the settlement was to be a stand alone site, there was a requirement to provide more houses over and above the Government's target.

In response, Councillor Barker said she could not confirm that exactly 3,000 homes would be created as part of any new settlement at Elsenham. Four options had been included in the LDF consultation and there was no guarantee which option would be selected at the close of the consultation period. In addition, no developer would plan to provide precisely the number of homes included in the core strategy. She could provide no further clarification on whether any new development would be linked or stand alone. She had never used the term "eco settlement" and she felt there was some confusion about the use of this term. This was because additional grant money was available for settlements of at least 10,000 dwellings as was the case at Northstowe in Cambridgeshire. The viability of a community had nothing to do with this or any other figure. For example, she said that Thaxted was presently a viable community with far fewer than 3,000 homes.

The Chairman said that she had asked for clarification of the consultation document as the wording was not as had been agreed by the Environment Committee. This was not something that had been requested by the Liberal Democrat Group.

Councillor Gayler said that before he left the Council's employment, David Demery had made a presentation to the Dunmow Town Strategy Group for pedestrianisation of the Great Dunmow Eastern Sector development. The developer had met the Town Council with proposals along the lines suggested by Mr Demery. Unfortunately, in Mr Demery's absence it appeared that no-one was available at Uttlesford to discuss these proposals and the developer might have no option other than to revert to the provision of a more basic scheme. He asked Councillor Barker to use her best endeavours not to lose this opportunity to provide a valuable development scheme in Great Dunmow and to utilise fully the support of the Town Council.

Councillor Barker said that she had spoken to officers about the entrance to the car park and she was happy to pursue this matter in the appropriate way so that a full range of facilities could be provided as part of the Eastern Sector development.

Councillor A Dean expressed concern about the delivery of the core strategy consultation leaflet, particularly in Stansted. He said that many householders, including himself, had registered with the mailing preference service to minimise the delivery of junk mail and he felt that this had affected the delivery of the consultation leaflets. Many of his neighbours had not received the leaflet. He had spoken to his local postman who had stated that Royal Mail had been overwhelmed by the delivery of the document to all households during the busy Christmas delivery period and that many leaflets had been returned as a result. He asked for an assurance that delivery of the leaflet would be reinstated and the consultation period extended accordingly.

Councillor Barker said that she would ask officers to contact Royal Mail to ensure that all remaining deliveries of the leaflet took place this week. It was not possible to extend the consultation period as this was determined by statute, but she gave an assurance that all responses received would be taken into account even if this was after the consultation had closed.

Councillor Dean then referred to the inadequacy of the information submitted as part of the consultation exercise, particularly in relation to the strain that a new development would place on existing infrastructure. For example, under Option 4 there would be a new school in Elsenham, but it had not been stated that the existing school in Stansted was likely to be closed. He asked for the Council to hold an exhibition in the Stansted and Elsenham area to explain in more detail the implications of Option 4 so that they could be fully understood. He said that the Area Panel meeting in January would consider the LDF process and he asked for maps and full information to be provided at that meeting.

Councillor Barker said that it was not the intention to have a road show in Stansted, Elsenham or anywhere else as it was not realistic to do so. The core strategy consultation leaflet was better and more comprehensive than that produced by other councils in Essex and provided enough information for those residents who wish to respond. She said that the consultation exercise was an officer led process and that Members would become more fully involved once all responses to the consultation had been fully evaluated.

The Leader said that he had been disappointed to read comments in the local press that the core strategy consultation was dishonest. The leaflet set out fully all four options and full information was available on each of these. In addition, there was a link on the website to the full document. In comparison, one adjoining local authority had produced a consultation leaflet consisting of one sheet of A4 paper and had not set out fully all the options being explored. The comment about dishonest consultation was outrageous and should be retracted.

Councillor Knight said that questions about the number of homes to be provided under Option 4 was part of an orchestrated campaign by the Liberal Democrat Group and she asked how it was possible to provide the necessary infrastructure unless the Council's preferred option was chosen.

Councillor Barker said that it was not possible to pre-empt the Council's decision and she hoped that the necessary infrastructure needed for any new settlements in Uttlesford would be provided whichever option was chosen. She referred to problems relating to the provision of school places caused by relatively small developments in her ward and hoped that it would be possible to find innovative ways to obtain upfront funding for new developments as was being explored, for example, in Cambridge City.

Councillor Wilcock asked the Leader to comment on the statement by Councillor Barker that the LDF consultation was an officer led process. He asked for an assurance that the Leader would keep a firm hand on the tiller and that he would not abdicate his responsibilities.

In response the Leader assured Councillor Wilcock that he would keep his hand fully on the tiller in terms of the process. The Council was conducting a comprehensive consultation and all responses received would be analysed and evaluated fully by planning officers and summarised in the report to the Environment Committee. The consultation leaflet had been sent instead of Uttlesford Life to emphasise the importance of the core strategy consultation. Had it been incorporated as part of Uttlesford Life he felt sure that the LDF consultation would have received less attention from those in receipt of the document.

Councillor Sell asked Councillor Barker to confirm whether she accepted that the introduction of option four was Administration led and that the consultation fell below Government guidelines.

Councillor Barker said that she accepted that option four was introduced by members of the Administration group. This process would be led strategically by Councillors and the role of officers was to evaluate the consultation exercise. The Director of Development had explained this clearly in various communications to Members and she would ask him to do this again if Members still did not understand how the process would work.

Councillor Menell said that the area champion for the North Area Panel had asked whether the Director of Development would attend the January panel meeting for a full discussion of the LDF process.

In response the Director of Development confirmed that he would attend this meeting.

C57 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Anjum, Miller, Salmon and Smith.

C58 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Lemon declared an interest in item 7 on the agenda as a parish councillor in Hatfield Heath.

Councillor Godwin declared her interest in item 7 as a ward representative for Birchanger and a parish councillor.

Councillor Sell declared his interest in item 7 as a Stansted parish councillor.

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

C59 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 October 2007 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

C60

BUSINESS ARISING

(i) Minute C39 – Members’ Question and Answer Session

Councillor Morson reminded Members that he had submitted copies of petitions, together with a further 53 letters concerning the preferred option in the LDF for 3,000 homes to be built at Elsenham, at the last meeting.

He asked that these communications be taken into account as part of the consultation process even though they had technically been submitted before the consultation began.

Councillor Barker said that the petitions and letters referred to would be noted but that all respondents should be urged to submit a specific response to the consultation document. The Director of Development confirmed that these communications would be taken into account and given the degree of weight they merited.

(ii) Minute C45 – Leader’s communications

The Leader advised the meeting that £260 had been forwarded to Carver Barracks in support of Sapper Gillespie who had lost a leg in Afghanistan.

C61

CHAIRMAN’S COMMUNICATIONS

The Chairman congratulated Swards End Parish Council on achieving quality status and hoped that a representative of the parish council would come to the February meeting of the Council so that this achievement could be properly marked. She urged all members to sign the pledge to campaign against more runways at Stansted Airport available at this meeting and said that a planning application for the provision of a second runway was expected to be submitted in early 2008.

She urged members to consider joining the friends of Easton Lodge Gardens where a social function had been held earlier in the year and referred to a commendation made by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors in respect of the work carried out at Bridge End Gardens. The award ceremony had been attended by Councillor Lemon and John Bosworth and reflected great credit on the officers concerned.

She advised Members that ex-councillors Anne Marchant and John Murphy had both recently married. On a sadder note ex-councillor Hugh Free had died recently and she was sorry to report that Trish Halford, a member of staff in both Audit and Parking for many years, had died earlier this week. She said that all members would wish to send their condolences on this sad occurrence.

The Chairman said that ten members of staff were leaving shortly on voluntary redundancy terms, including Mick Purkiss who would be very much missed for his contribution to Council meetings over very many years, as

would Jane McKie and Elaine Baynes for their work with Members. She urged all members to use the voting paper for the staff awards for 2007.

She reminded Members that the carol service would take place on the following evening at Stansted Church followed by refreshments. It had been decided this year that no Christmas cards would be sent by the Chairman, the Leader or the Chief Executive and the money saved would be given to a nominated charity. In conclusion, she said that all staff who were leaving would be much missed and she was sure that all members would want to join with her in wishing them well.

C62

LEADER'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Leader said that Sir Alan Haselhurst MP had arranged for all group leaders to meet with Hazel Blears, Secretary of State at the Department for Communities and Local Government, to make the Council's case for reducing the number of additional homes that were required to be provided in Uttlesford as part of the LDF process. The meeting would take place on Tuesday, 18 December.

Together with Councillor Rolfe, the LSP Chairman, and the Head of Partnerships and Performance, he had attended a recent function at Essex County Council to launch part 2 of the Essex Partnerships agreement. It had been agreed that Essex would operate as a pilot area for this important group and a document was being prepared to shape future priorities.

He wished to endorse the comments of the Chairman concerning all those staff who would be leaving the Council's employment and made particular mention of Mick Purkiss who was well known to all Members for his work in Council and committee administration.

C63

MATTERS ARISING FROM COMMITTEES

(i) Standards Committee – Minute S23 – Town and Parish representatives on the Standards Committee

RESOLVED that the request of the Standards Committee to increase the number of town and parish council representatives on the Standards Committee to three be approved.

(ii) Extraordinary Licensing Committee – Minute LC37 – Licensing Act Policy Revisions

Councillor Hicks said that the Licensing Committee had considered making revisions to the Licensing Act policy over a number of meetings and he asked members to adopt the revisions now being recommended.

Councillor Sell said that Stansted Parish Council had responded to the Council's consultation referring to the nuisance caused to members of the public in various parts of Stansted, including Lower Street, as a result of the ban on smoking in public places. This was causing pavements outside

licensed premises to be obstructed. Councillor Hicks responded that a cumulative impact policy would not be sustainable as this would potentially be subject to challenge and judicial review. The Council was required to consider the licensing requirements for each licensed premises being reviewed on the individual merits of each case.

Councillor Sell referred to action that had been taken by the police in parts of London to control the obstruction of public pavements. Councillor Hicks said that the remedy for any perceived problem in Uttlesford laid with an appropriate complaint to the police so that action could be taken where necessary. The Assistant Chief Executive confirmed that the interpretation of the Council's powers as explained by Councillor Hicks was correct. It was open to any interested party to ask for a licensing review to be carried out in any particular case and the Council was obliged to conduct such a review.

RESOLVED that the Licensing Act draft policy be adopted, subject to the additions set out in paragraphs 13(c) and (d) and paragraphs 15(a), (b) and (c) of the report to the Licensing Committee on 27 November, and that the policy for the following of best practice be endorsed in connection with the Challenge 21 policy as a suggested measure.

(iii) **Community Committee – Minute C71 – Housing Policy and Land Disposal**

Councillor Godwin asked for confirmation that the two larger sites at Birchwood would be retained for car parking use. The Head of Housing Management confirmed that this would be the case. Councillor Schneider said that she would use her very best endeavours to ensure that the site at Broomfields would be utilised for the provision of affordable housing.

It was now necessary for the Council to approve the disposal of the various parcels of land at Birchwood and Broomfields as the market value exceeded the sum of £25,000 delegated for approval to the Community Committee.

RESOLVED that the site at Broomfields, Hatfield Heath be transferred to a RSL at nil or affordable housing value and that the two smaller sites at Birchwood, Birchanger be offered for sale on the open market to offset the gap in funding and allow for a regeneration scheme to be brought forward.

(iv) **North Area Panel – Minute NP19 – Question and Answer Session**

Councillor Menell reported that the consultation period in relation to the proposed closure of four post offices within the district had now concluded.

C64

MEMBERS' EXTERNAL APPOINTMENTS

Members received a report assessing the merit of retaining certain appointments to external bodies made by the Council. It was noted that 63 such appointments were presently made.

The report contained a comprehensive schedule of those organisations concerned and examine the merits of retaining representation in each case. It was being recommended that the Council consider whether the appointments listed in group 2 should be discontinued and that the Council should resolve to discontinue the appointments listed in group 3.

Councillor Sell asked that Uttlesford Carers be removed from the list of those appointments to be discontinued. He felt that the work carried out by Uttlesford Carers should be supported and would grow in value as the population age profile increased. Councillor Bellingham-Smith confirmed that she was willing to continue acting as the Council's representative on this body.

Councillor Hudson asked about the position of the Eastern Orchestral Board, now known as Orchestras United. He felt that withdrawal of support for this body might be detrimental to the continuation of the music festival at Thaxted. The Chairman explained that discontinuing the Council's representation on this body would have no impact in terms of financial support.

Councillor Menell said that she thought the Community Support Group and the Alcohol and Drug Strategy Group both listed in group 1 of the report would operate in a more linked way in the future. She said that she was chairman of Uttlesford Buffy Bus Association rather than a representative of the Council, as suggested in the report and asked whether Councillor Schneider had a view on whether she should continue to act as the Council's representative. Direct representation from the Council was incorporated as part of the Association's constitution and this would need to be amended if the Association was excluded from representation. In the circumstances, it was agreed to remove the Buffy Bus Association from the list of those organisations in group 2.

The Leader asked whether the Alzheimer's Society should be viewed in the same light as Uttlesford Carers as there was a strong link between the work carried out by the two organisations. As the Council's current representative Councillor Hicks said that he was quite willing to continue to attend meetings of the Society, but if the Council wished to discontinue representation he could continue to receive appropriate papers.

Councillor Knight referred to her representation on the Campaign to Protect Rural Essex, included in group 1 in the report, and suggested that the Council could discontinue its representation of that body and ask to continue to receive minutes and other appropriate papers. Councillor Cant disagreed with Councillor Knight as she considered that continued attendance at the CPRE was a valuable means of interchanging ideas and liaising with other parts of the county.

Councillor Menell pointed out that several members of the Council were represented on Uttlesford Futures and the organisation of that body was under review. She also noted that the West Essex Primary Care Trust was included in group 1 of the report, but she was effectively not a formal representative of the Council as there was no statutory obligation for the PCT to accept local authority representation. In response to her comments, the Chief Executive explained that Uttlesford Futures was in a slightly different

position from that of other bodies on the list as it was effectively the Council's own creation. He said that West Essex PCT would not accept representation on its management board and Members would have to consider how best to represent the views of the Council on health care matters.

RESOLVED that the Council discontinue its representation on the following bodies:

Accuro (formerly ResCU)
Arts Council of England
Dame Johane Bradbury's School
Eastern Orchestral Board – now Orchestras United
Essex Cycling Forum
Essex Sport
Local Government Arts Forum
Local Government Information Unit
Old Manse Home Community Support Group
Saffron Walden Age Concern

C65

REPORT OF THE EXTRAORDINARY PERFORMANCE SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON 11 DECEMBER 2007

Councillor Rolfe, as Chairman of the Performance Select Committee, invited the Acting Chief Financial Officer to explain the outcome of the extraordinary meeting of the Committee held earlier that day. The Committee considered the comments of the Audit Commission on the 2006/07 accounts and the statement of internal control as submitted to the meeting.

A matter had been identified concerning a lease arrangement for the provision of waste collection vehicles set up in August 2006 as a financial lease rather than an operating lease and this arrangement had been reviewed by the Audit Commission. Accordingly the accounts were not correct as the Council had lost its debt free status when it had signed the finance lease agreement.

Councillor Rolfe explained that the Performance Select Committee had accepted the 2006/07 accounts as presented, accepting the consequences of this qualification of the accounts and the loss of debt free status. The Council's arrangements for the use of resources had been classified in category 1 by the Audit Commission, that is as 'inadequate'. The Committee had discussed at length the overspending that had occurred and the unplanned use of reserves and had expressed regret at the inadequate advice taken at that time. He then outlined in full the recommendations of the Performance Select Committee. Councillor Barker said that the status of the lease in question would not be correct as part of the 2006/07 accounts, but would be rectified this year.

Councillor Godwin said that she was sad and embarrassed at the mess the Council found itself in. The picture painted had been one of a lax organisation living beyond its means. A number of Councillors had tried to highlight these problems at the time the budgets were set but they had been outnumbered and their concerns not listened to. The Council now had to move forward and this would involve everyone working together. She was sorry that there would

be a number of victims of this situation among the Council's staff, but regretted there was no alternative if the Council's financial position was to be remedied.

On behalf of Members, Councillor Rolfe thanked the Acting Chief Financial Officer and the Acting Head of Finance for all of the extra work they had carried out to identify the errors in the Council's budget. The Council owed these officers a debt of gratitude.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the Council does not rework the 2006/07 accounts and accepts the consequence of this qualification of the accounts and the loss of debt free status.
- 2 It be noted that:
 - The Council had entered a financial rather than an operational vehicle lease for its waste vehicles;
 - The Council had received a classification of category one ('inadequate') from the Audit Commission as regards its use of resources.
 - The Council did not set a balanced budget for 2006/07 which led to an overspend of £770,000 and the unplanned use of reserves.

C66

GENERAL FUND AND HRA BUDGET UPDATE 2007/08

The Acting Chief Financial Officer introduced David Bradley (Acting Head of Finance) and apologised for the late submission of the reports relating both to this item and to the 2008/09 Budget. This was because it was necessary to brief staff on the underlying financial difficulties facing the Council before details of the additional budget shortfall were made public. This had been done at a staff meeting on Friday 7 December.

The Leader said that the Council faced a considerable financial challenge in the period ahead. The details reported to this meeting confirmed that the warnings that he and his colleagues had voiced in February that the budget for the current year was unsafe were well founded. In brief terms the position was that savings amounting to £460,000 had been found to set against the deficit of £1.1m previously identified, but that a further shortfall in budget provision had now come to light with the effect that the projected General Fund deficit now stood at £938,466.

It was clear that a major failure in financial planning had taken place requiring further significant savings to be achieved before a budget could be set for 2008/09.

Staff numbers had grown to a level that could no longer be afforded and it was now necessary to seek direct savings in staffing costs amounting to £1.1m. He undertook to do all in his power to minimise the option of compulsory staff redundancies, but it was unlikely that redundancies could be avoided and the matter had to be faced. For this reason, he had spoken directly to staff at the

end of last week and explained the position. This had not been easy to do but he considered that staff were entitled to be told the choices that faced Members in order to set a legal budget in February.

Reserves and balances had been depleted to the point where no more would remain by the end of the current financial year due to overspending and poor financial control and he regretted the need to move the recommendations in the report. He was determined to turn around the Council's financial position in order to set a balanced budget for next year. He highlighted the example of Fenland District Council which had encountered similar problems in previous years and had now recovered to the point where the Council had achieved excellent status. He was determined that the Council would be put back into a sound financial position which had always been the case until recent years.

Councillor Wilcock said that he agreed with Councillor Godwin's remarks about the need for an open and honest dialogue, rather than just allocating blame for past mistakes. He and his colleagues were prepared to engage in an open process and to co-operate into any investigation into what had gone wrong. He said that he was very sorry for staff who had been placed in such a difficult position. He quoted the minutes of the budget setting meeting in February 2007 stating that, in the Chief Financial Officer's view, there was sufficient capacity in the budget for 2007/08 and reserves were at an adequate level. It was now clear that that advice had been wrong and it was now necessary to rebuild the trust that had existed previously. He said that all Members should work together to resolve the Council's problems and to maintain services at an acceptable level.

Councillor Chambers said that he had been proud to be a member of the District Council over very many years and, generally speaking, proud of the authority's staff. During the last four years the previous administration had virtually bankrupted the Council. He agreed that it was necessary to move forward, but the necessary measures would be put in place by the current administration. He hoped that it would be possible to place the Council on a firm footing sooner rather than later and the financial position would be back on track within a period of two years. To a large degree this depended on whether more discrepancies were uncovered in the coming months. This had been his most difficult time over 30 years in local government, but if the correct steps were taken it should be possible to become once more one of the best run councils in the country.

Councillor Sell said that he regretted the remarks made by Councillor Chambers suggesting that the Administration would not wish to engage in a meaningful dialogue with the Liberal Democrat Group. The Administration should be trying to achieve a consensus view about how to deal with the Council's present difficulties.

Councillor Rolfe said that there had been no financial control for four years as the overspending had begun in 2005/06 and this had resulted in the steady depletion of reserves. Every figure produced during this period had been unrealistic and it was now necessary to make staff redundant because of this financial incompetence.

RESOLVED that the current projected General Fund deficit and the level of available balances and reserves be noted.

C67

GENERAL FUND AND HRA BUDGETS 2008/09

Councillor Chambers said the budget update for 2008/09 carried on the trend from the previous item. He tabled a supplementary report containing a proposed timetable of action to set in train the statutory redundancy process and to achieve the savings required by the end of the financial year. He regretted that it would not be possible to achieve the degree of savings needed to achieve a balanced budget by means other than compulsory redundancies. He would do everything possible to ensure that there were as few redundancies as possible but the priority must be the best interests of council tax payers. He proposed acceptance of the recommendations in the report including adoption of the proposed timetable set out in the supplementary report tabled at this meeting.

Councillor Godwin said that she was happy to endorse the recommendation being proposed and that the suggested action timetable should be adopted. She proposed that Members should be more closely involved in this process, and suggested that monthly reports should be submitted updating the financial position and said that more internal audit checks should be put into place. The coming staff changes would weaken and unbalance the Council and a study should be undertaken after three months to analyse the effect of the changes that had taken place.

Councillor Chambers gave an assurance that monthly reports would be provided to Members and closer liaison undertaken where necessary. He intended to take a firm personal grip on all of the Council's finances.

Councillor Menell referred to a horror story of mis-management at the authority and sought an undertaking that all staff would be considered for redundancy and not just front line staff. In response, Councillor Chambers agreed that would be the case.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the forecast budget deficit, the position in respect of reserves and balances, including under Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003, the outstanding request for costs from BAA and the impact on the budget if successful, and the need to reduce staff costs all be noted;
- 2 Directors and Heads of Division be instructed to seek additional income from fees and charges;
- 3 the proposed Council Tax increase of 3.5% for 2008/09 be reconsidered;
- 4 the date of the next meeting of the Council be changed from 14 February to Tuesday 19 February 2008; and
- 5 the timetable of action set out in the supplementary report to this meeting be agreed including provision for a special Finance and Administration Committee meeting on or about Tuesday 15 January 2008.

C68

CORPORATE PLAN 2007-09

The Leader presented a report setting out, in full, the Corporate Plan for the period 2007-09. The four main priorities of Finance, Partnerships, People and Environment were set out in the report.

Councillor A Dean said that he had no difficulties with the content of the Corporate Plan, but was concerned about the information that was not included. He felt that the plan should be underpinned by departmental action plans for delivery of the priorities. In the absence of these plans it was not possible to determine whether delivery was possible.

The Leader said that this was a new Corporate Plan and had no link with the Quality of Life plan produced by the previous administration. The Council's precarious financial position meant that the plan had been produced against a background of shifting ground, but had set out very clearly what the Administration intended to achieve.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the Corporate Plan 2007-09 be approved, and
- 2 the responsible committees be requested to determine the measurement and targets of the corporate indicators for approval by the Performance Select Committee with monitoring commencing in April 2008.

C69

FUTURE OF STAAP/AIRPORT POLICY TASK GROUP

Members received a report suggesting that the Airport Policy Task Group be wound up and the terms of reference of STAAP be broadened to include the remit of the Task Group. Councillor Artus said that retaining both groups amounted to a duplication of responsibilities and proposed adoption of the recommendation.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the Airport Policy Task Group be wound up;
- 2 the terms of reference of STAAP be broadened to include the remit of the Airport Policy Task Group; and
- 3 in matters of urgency, the current practice of officers taking action following consultation with group leaders and the relevant chairmen (including the chairman of STAAP) be continued.

C70

ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

The Chairman wished all Members and Officers a happy Christmas and said that she hoped to see as many Members as possible at the carol service on the following evening.

The meeting ended at 9.40 pm.

COUNCIL MEETING – 11 DECEMBER 2007

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

(i) Tasmin Lees - Elsenham

Tasmin (aged 12) said that she had lived in Elsenham all of her life. She had become fed up with her mother attending meetings about the proposed development at Elsenham identified in the LDF consultation. However, when she had seen the map produced by Fairfield Partnership it had rendered her speechless because of the effect it would have on the communities of Henham and Elsenham. The Leader had decided to add this option to the three originally considered and she was concerned that councillors were acting like bullies by forcing development on these communities. She asked the Council to listen to the concerns of young people. Travel around the district and into places such as Bishop's Stortford was already difficult. If the development of 3,000 extra homes took place it would take for ever and she would have no social life left.

(ii) Petrina Lees - Elsenham

Petrina Lees said that her daughter had written her statement entirely herself. She felt a sense of disappointment and disillusionment with the Council for choosing Elsenham as the preferred option and the way in which the consultation was being conducted. Councillor Barker had said that the consultation would be incorporated into Uttlesford Life but the glossy leaflet produced had been delivered sporadically. She estimated that two-thirds of residents in Elsenham had not received the leaflet and this was unacceptable. Other councils such as Birmingham had extended the consultation period and Uttlesford should do the same.

The information produced also contained limited visual information and was unfriendly to non IT literate people. Interested parties would have to apply for the full consultation document and would either have to collect this in person, or attempt to download it from the website. She had attempted to do this since the end of November without success.

Mrs Lees also expressed concern that only one day's notice had been given that a planning officer would not be able to attend a public meeting in Elsenham even though this had been requested well in advance.

She concluded with three questions to the Council. Why had the distribution of the consultation leaflet been so badly organised? For example, residents who had signed up for the mailing preference service had not received the document. Secondly, she asked how could residents be sure that the consultation would be a true one, because of the process by which the preferred option had been selected? Finally, she pointed out that there had been no mention of development at Elsenham as a single settlement in the first consultation and wondered why this should be so?