

COUNCIL MEETING held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 17 JULY 2012 at 7.30pm

Present: Councillor C Cant – Chairman.
Councillors K Artus, S Barker, R Chambers, J Cheetham, J Davey, A Dean, R Eastham, I Evans, M Foley, J Freeman, E Godwin, S Harris, E Hicks, S Howell, A Ketteridge, J Ketteridge, T Knight, M Lemon, K Mackman, J Menell, D Morson, E Oliver, E Parr, D Perry, V Ranger, J Redfern, H Rolfe, J Rose, D Sadler, J Salmon, L Smith, A Walters, L Wells and P Wilcock.

Officers in attendance: J Mitchell (Chief Executive), R Dobson (Democratic Services Officer), M Perry (Assistant Chief Executive – Legal), R Harborough (Director of Public Services), P Snow (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager) and A Webb (Director of Corporate Services).

The Chairman congratulated Councillor Harris (nee Favell), on her marriage.

C22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors H Asker, G Barker, D Crome, P Davies, K Eden, D Jones, J Loughlin and J Rich.

Councillors S Barker and Chambers declared their interest as Members of Essex County Council and of Essex Fire Authority.

C23 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The minutes of the meetings held on 15 May 2012 and 11 June 2012 were received, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

C24 MEMBERS' QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

Councillor Morson asked the Leader how Members would be involved in considering the results of the local plan consultation. The Leader said that whilst at this stage members' consideration of the outcome of the Local Plan consultation had not been determined, a workshop was likely to be arranged.

Councillor Foley asked Councillor Chambers about the threat of closure of Clarence House in Thaxted. Councillor Chambers said there was little news at present. He too was concerned about some of the premises owned by Essex County Council in Uttlesford, and would continue to look into this issue.

Councillor Parr asked the Leader whether he remained opposed to a second runway at Stansted Airport in light of the recent statement by Boris Johnson, Mayor of London, in favour of a second runway. Councillor Ketteridge said it was the policy of the administration to continue to be opposed to a second runway.

Councillor Evans asked Councillor Chambers what he was going to do to help those people who were vulnerable or became homeless under the benefits changes due to take place. Councillor Chambers said the Council would do all it could to ensure vulnerable people were looked after.

Councillor Evans asked how the hardship fund would be used.

Councillor Chambers said that it would first be necessary to be clear about the criteria and administration of the hardship fund.

Councillor Rose asked Councillor Barker how a village of Newport's size was expected to cope with a minimum 40% increase in housing, the word 'minimum' being a concern to Newport residents, as it suggested an even greater number of houses could be built; how utilities were expected to cope; what provision would be made for affordable housing; and why development proposals did not include a business centre.

Councillor Barker said she appreciated that 40% was a proportionately large increase, but development was proposed for the same proportion in other areas such as Elsenham and Great Dunmow. The reason why the plan included the word 'minimum' was that this description was necessary as otherwise the plan would have to state only 'up to' the figure proposed, which would not give certainty regarding the number of houses which the plan required. All development sites under the plan would require utilities upgrades. Regarding affordable housing, the Council's standard policy was to provide 40% affordable housing in development sites. Councillor Redfern was looking at policies to try to ensure affordable development was mixed with market housing. Regarding business sites, the first consultation round had invited people to come forward with sites around Newport and Wendens Ambo stations, but no sites had been put forward. Councillor Barker invited Councillor Rose to encourage people to come forward with suitable business sites.

Councillor Rose said it would be helpful for the Council's economic development officer Simon Jackson to address Newport Parish Council. Councillor Barker agreed.

Councillor Knight asked in relation to the local plan consultation whether the Cabinet had considered reverting to Government to make representations that agricultural land should not be subject to development, in light of the increasing problem of world food shortages and the fact that this area also tended to suffer from drought. She felt the majority of new housing development was intended to benefit incomers rather than people from this area.

Councillor Ketteridge said that the Council had been down this road already, and had made representations regarding housing numbers both to the present and the last Government. Whilst the Council did not wish to over provide for Uttlesford, scope for reduction in the housing numbers was limited. It was necessary to demonstrate to the Planning Inspectorate next year that the Council's plan was based on evidence.

Councillor Barker said the entire country's population had increased over the last decade and that there were 1,200 people on the Council's waiting list for housing.

Councillor Wilcock asked Councillor Barker whether when looking at housing numbers the Council could be sure it was not looking at large schemes which would take years to assimilate.

Councillor Barker said most of the sites were large areas of housing but that this did not prevent villages moving forward on exception schemes. It was important to be wary of developers selling off part of their schemes; therefore she would encourage local councillors to be involved in the process.

C25 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman said she had recently attended two events, Sparks Will Fly, and the Olympic Torch Relay. Both had involved a great deal of work and Councillor Lemon, as Chairman of the Olympics Working Group, the Emergency Planning Officer, Lisa Lipscombe and the Community Partnerships Manager, Gaynor Bradley had been closely involved in preparing for these events. She wished to praise these individuals highly, together with the Council's team of staff and volunteers from towns and villages. Despite the deluge the volunteers had acted as an amazing team and had gone beyond the call of duty, and she wished to add her thanks to those already expressed by the Leader, the Chief Executive and Councillor Lemon to the teams who had made this a very special day for Uttlesford.

The Chairman informed members of the charities she had chosen to support this year, the Marie Curie Nurses and Diabetes UK. The Chairman said she had personal reasons for wishing to support these particular charities. In order to raise funds she was planning to hold a quiz night on 23 October and she hoped members would come to this event and encourage others within their party groups or town and parish councils to put together teams. As times were difficult for local businesses, rather than approach them for raffle prizes, she asked members to consider donating prizes, with proceeds going towards not only the two charities, but also to be raffled at the Christmas Staff Awards.

C26 **LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Councillor Ketteridge endorsed the Chairman's comments regarding the Olympic Torch Relay. He invited Councillor Lemon, as Chairman of the Olympic Working Group, to speak.

Councillor Lemon said 7 July 2012 had been a historic day for Uttlesford. The *Blue Peter* broadcast had been a huge success with over 1,000 children attending. Record numbers of people were out on the streets in Stansted, Newport and Saffron Walden where the Torch Relay had passed through the district. The many hours of preparation paid off and despite the rain people were in good heart. He wished to thank publicly the many volunteers and Council staff for making this a special day, and in particular he wanted to thank Gaynor

Bradley, Lisa Lipscombe and their teams, as well as John Mitchell, for all their unstinting hard work.

Councillor Ketteridge said thanks were also due to Councillor Lemon in preparing for these events.

Councillor Ketteridge said he had attended the LGA conference recently. The main theme of the discussions there was future funding, for example, the issue of business rate repatriation and the 50% which the Treasury intended to keep. Councillor Ketteridge said that pleas for this policy to be reconsidered were currently falling on deaf ears. The mood of the conference had been downbeat, as funding to 2019/20 had been considered, and if no changes were made to income streams by 2020 local government would only be able to fund adult social care and nothing else. Savings and shared services were still on the agenda but these did not by any means go far enough. Some debate had taken place on community budgets: an Essex scheme was currently being piloted, and would be reported in September.

Councillor Ketteridge said he had received a letter from Bob Neil, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, on the business rate retention scheme. If any member wanted further information they could contact Councillor Ketteridge. He had also received a letter from Andrew Stunnell MP regarding support for the community and voluntary sectors. Councillor Ketteridge said he considered Uttlesford did quite well already in this regard.

C27

MATTERS OF REPORT FROM MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE

Councillor Chambers gave an update on the finance and administration portfolio. He referred to consultation due to take place on replacement next year of Council Tax Benefit by a new system of localised Council Tax support; and the possible revenues and benefits partnership between Uttlesford and Harlow Council, progress of which had been affected by changing circumstances particularly a change of political administration at Harlow. He summarised how the Council was facing the continuing difficult financial outlook.

Councillor Eastham asked about the reduction of support from local government finance and a reference to further cuts of up to 30%. Councillor Chambers said the 30% represented a cut based on the remaining figure after the cut of 28%.

The Leader commented the next government spending review would take place in 2014 when local government would be subject to further spending cuts.

Councillor Morson asked about management of staff expectations, in the revenues and benefits service, regarding the proposed partnership with Harlow.

Councillor Chambers said the Leader and Chief Executive had ensured staff in the revenues and benefits department were being kept fully informed about the situation.

Councillor Foley referred to the transfer of Thaxted car park to Thaxted Town Council, and asked if there were any further plans to move assets which were currently owned by the District Council to Town or Parish Councils, as there were implications for local taxpayers.

Councillor Chambers said that since 2007 the Council had a policy of trying to devolve assets to a more local level where possible, but that currently there were no further specific transfers being planned.

Councillor Barker as executive member for the environment made a statement summarising the work she had recently undertaken. She referred to the consultation on the local plan; the Essex Flood Partnership; and the North Essex Parking Partnership. The NEPP was considering various traffic schemes which would be brought to Cabinet in due course. The possibility of having mobile cameras monitoring inconsiderate parking outside schools was also being looked into. Councillor Barker then described in brief the current changes to the waste and recycling service, which had gone well and for which she asked management to pass on her thanks to staff. She gave an overview of the total recycling percentage for the district which in 2011/12 was 55.22%, a high percentage but one which she hoped could be increased to 60%.

Councillor Ranger asked about the status of the Council's contract with Essex Textiles, and whether fabrics placed in green bins were viable for re-use if they were contaminated with broken glass.

Councillor Barker said she would check the status of the textiles contract and respond to Councillor Ranger. As far as she was aware, fabrics were still viable for recycling after being in contact with glass. She said she was arranging a visit for Members to a MRF recycling facility, which would demonstrate how sophisticated recycling had now become.

In reply to questions from Councillor Eastham, Councillor Barker said very little should now be going in black bins as the majority of waste could be recycled.

Councillor Rose asked about garden waste collection skips. Councillor Barker said this year 50% of the funding by the District Council had been withdrawn, and it was for town and parish councils to decide if they still required the service. Next year the whole cost would be withdrawn, but if enough parishes subscribed the scheme would continue to be available.

Councillor Rolfe referred to a report he had circulated summarising recent activity within his portfolio of community partnerships and engagement. The report referred to the events in the district for the Olympics; the appointment of chairmen to the four working groups within Uttlesford Futures; Member training and support; Jubilee Fund applications; and the criteria and process to be determined for future voluntary sector support.

Councillor Salmon asked Councillor Rolfe how closely the Economic Development Officer was working with the planning department. Councillor

Rolfe said he hoped he was working with the planning department very closely, and that his post was within the same directorate.

Councillor Redfern gave a summary of the work being done within the housing portfolio, including a report on a housing conference which the Council had hosted; the work of the Housing Board on a review of the allocations policy to reflect the new bedrooms criteria under welfare reforms; a tenant survey due to take place in August, and the consideration given to the best use of funding available for homelessness. She said the Council was able to build more houses due to changes to the way the HRA was now funded. An improvement programme for the Council's stock was progressing with the aim of increasing energy efficiency and reducing fuel bills for tenants' properties.

Councillor Walters gave a summary of the work under his portfolio of community safety, referring to two initiatives, the Highways Panel and the Highways Rangers. The panel had considered a list of projects submitted to Essex Highways by town and parish councils and had made good progress in allocating the budget of £400,000. The Highways Rangers had started work three weeks ago, with the benefit of media publicity, and were tackling smaller tasks such as clearing verges. Residents could request their services via their town or parish council.

Councillor Barker asked whether Councillor Walters could confirm that potholes would be repaired.

Councillor Walters said potholes did not come within the scope of the district council, but Highways were shortly to start a major pothole repair exercise.

Councillor Cheetham spoke about the portfolio for aviation, for which she was responsible in addition to her role as Deputy Leader. Responses to the consultation on the aviation scoping report and on the CAA consultation on environmental issues had been submitted; she had attended Stansted Airport Consultative Committee and its sub-committee on environmental issues. She was also the Council's representative on SAGSIG which was a special interest group for councils having an airport in their area. She had met the minister for rail and aviation, Theresa Villiers MP, who had re-affirmed the government's view there should be no second runway at Stansted during the lifetime of this government. Whilst the draft aviation policy framework document had been released last week, and would be considered by the Stansted Airport Advisory Panel, it had excluded the south east, and this part of the document was now expected to be received in the autumn.

The Leader invited all Members to comment with their feedback on the value of including on the agenda reports from members of the executive.

C28 MATTERS RECEIVED FROM THE EXECUTIVE

No such matters were received.

C29 MATTERS RECEIVED ABOUT JOINT ARRANGEMENTS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

No such matters were received.

C30 MATTERS RECEIVED FROM COMMITTEES AND WORKING GROUPS

Councillor Howell, as Chairman of the Performance and Audit Committee, presented the annual report of the Committee to Council. The report referred to approval of the audited 2010/11 Statement of Accounts; the external audit and the work programme of the internal audit team. Councillor Howell said he wished to thank officers involved in the extensive work programme for this committee, as well as the members of the committee. He acknowledged the support received from Cabinet Members.

Members noted the report.

C31 FUTHER ELECTORAL REVIEW

The Chief Executive gave a verbal report on the further electoral review, for which the Council had agreed to submit a recommendation of between 38 to 40 councillors for the district. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England had now advised it would consult on a provisional number of 39 councillors. The consultation would take place from 24 July to 3 September. The Electoral Working Group would meet to discuss warding arrangements.

C32 MINUTES OF STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Due to the introduction of a new code of conduct system which had come into effect under the Localism Act 2011, the minutes of the final meeting of the Standards Committee under the former system were received and considered.

Subject to the correction of the date of the meeting to 14 May 2012, the minutes were signed as a true record.

C33 MATTERS ARISING

(i) Minute S25 – report on the outcome of an appeal against a decision of the Standards Committee

Councillor Dean said he wished to set the record straight regarding the reference in the Minutes of the Standards Committee to the interpretation of language he had used in his blog. Contrary to what had been stated in the Minutes of that Committee's meeting in November 2011, it was not right to say that he had realised his language had been inappropriate. He did not consider it inappropriate and nor did the Tribunal. He had said he would try to avoid writing anything that could be misinterpreted by others. He had based what he had said on fact, and considered his comments had been borne out by more examples than he had at first thought. He would be coming to the meeting of the new Standards Committee next week in order to try to ensure fair guidance was given to members; that there was a public benefit in assessing complaints that were less serious, politically motivated or vexatious; that there were fair criteria to protect

members from accusations of bias and to try to gain transparency so that justice was fair and seen to be so.

Councillor Knight said she had recently been the subject of a code of conduct hearing, the result of which was that she had been found not to have breached the code. In her view there were a number of issues which needed attention regarding procedures and the interpretation of the rules. She intended to report to the new chairman of the Standards Committee her concerns and felt there should be no referrals to the Standards Committee regarding allegations of breaches of the code of conduct in the meantime.

The meeting ended at 9.10pm.