

EAST AREA PANEL held at UNITED REFORM CHURCH FELSTED at 7.00PM on 9 JANUARY 2007

Present:- Councillor D W Gregory – Chairman.
Councillors C A Cant, C D Down, M A Gayler, E Gower, J P Murphy, A R Thawley and A M Wattebot.

Officers in attendance:- G Bradley, M Cox, D Demery, J Dyson, M Jones, S Saward and D Toombs.

Also present:- Sheila Clark (Felsted Parish Council), Clive Smith (Great Dunmow Town Council), B Grimshaw and P Simpson.

EP36 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S Flack, M L Foley, M Miller and F E Silver.

EP37 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2006 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

EP38 BUSINESS ARISING

(i) Minute EP29 – Thaxted Day Centre

In answer to a question from Councillor Thawley, Members were advised that the suggested environmental measures had been costed and a report would be going to the Community Committee on 18 January requesting additional funding.

(ii) Minute EP31 – Highways

Highways had provided written answers to some of the questions raised at the last meeting.

EP39 THE ROLE OF A MARKET TOWN PROJECT OFFICER

Sarah Saward, the Market Towns Project Officer gave a presentation about her role. The need for her post, originally called the Saffron Walden Project Officer, had resulted from the Saffron Walden Health check. This had identified over 100 projects to improve the environment of the Town. A Partnership Board had been established to prioritise the action plan and produce a list of projects. Her post was a catalyst for making things happen, by securing funding, getting groups together, establishing links between the community and the local authority and delivering the projects.

Projects in Saffron Walden had included setting up an active business forum, undertaking funding and marketing for the new cinema, putting in place a new heritage trail and proposals to improve the Market Square. She also provided support to other groups in the town, like the Skate Park project and was involved in setting up a street scene strategy. She said that her post had been successful because there had been a clear and coordinated action plan, community endorsement for the work and that she reported to one body and worked in the town.

Her role had now been widened to Market Towns Project Officer and she had started to work in Great Dunmow. A Dunmow Town Strategy Group had been set up and although there was no defined action plan, projects were being driven by active people in the town. There were already 3 clear projects; to consider Dunmow as a Cittaslow Town, looking at “living streets” and setting up a group to produce a design statement for the Town.

Members asked for a definition of Cittaslow. They were advised that it was to do with creating a slow pace of life and a relaxed ambiance and enjoying the local area. The town was required to produce a charter and a set of goals and the status could be obtained when 50% of these were met.

Members asked whether the post would also be involved in outlying areas. Sarah Saward replied that her primary objective was to make sure that the town itself developed, and in this way services would be provided to surrounding villages. It was hoped that in the longer term work might extend to Thaxted and Stansted.

EP40

EASTERN SECTOR REDEVELOPMENT

David Demery, the Council’s Architect and Property Advisor gave an update on the project to redevelop the Eastern Sector, off the High Street, Great Dunmow. The main contract operated by Taylor Woodrow would commence in March and take about 2 years to complete. The associated development by Shire Hall would start later and finish approximately 3 years from March 2007.

He explained that there would be a new two way access to the site adjacent to Dunmow Inn. He further explained the entry, exit arrangements to the car park which meant that there would be minimal traffic to the backland and through the site. Discussions were taking place with Essex County Council as to the design of the new library and above this there would be 10 affordable flats. The vehicular access to the Boars Head Public House would be stopped up which would enable the creation of a small town square. This would change the dynamics of the town and it was important to exploit the benefits and put forward ideas as to the detailed design of this area.

In answer to a question from Bryan Grimshaw, it was confirmed that the recycling containers would be moved to the rear of the site. Councillor Murphy said that the local Councils should have a say in the type of street furniture provided and suggested that a meeting be held with the architect. Councillor Thawley added that the District Council, as local planning authority, would have a say over the design. It was confirmed that there were no plans at this

stage to alter the appearance of the Co op building. Also the existing toilet block would remain.

Councillor Wattebot asked how the environmental measures for the new buildings could be influenced. David Demery said that some of this was covered by building regulations, but the detailed design requirements had received full planning approval some time ago and any additional measures would be subject to negotiation. Councillor Cant asked if the site might be large enough to provide trees with seating for sunny days. David Demery said that there might be some opportunity for trees to be provided in the central space. Councillor Gayler asked whether Officers had considered providing some sort of surface that would allow mixed traffic and pedestrians, as only delivery vehicles would be allowed through the site. It was also confirmed that there would be a net gain of 40 parking spaces within the site

It was noted that there would be some disruption in the High Street, by a traffic light controlled junction for construction traffic while the site was being constructed.

The Chairman said it was inevitable that some disruption would occur but he was pleased that after 18 years this major issue was close to being resolved.

EP41

CONSULTATION RESPONSES ON DISTRICT COUNCIL BUDGET 2007/08

John Dyson, the Council's Chief Accountant, presented information on the District Council's budget for 2007/08. This was the first time that formal consultation had taken place. A questionnaire had been sent to all parish councils asking for their views. Any comments would be fed back to the appropriate policy committees before final decisions on the budget were made by the Operations Committee then Full Council in February.

John Dyson explained how the budget setting took place and what the budget requirement comprised. Uttlesford had the lowest council tax of all authorities in Essex, and the probable increase was 4.5%. Only 10% of the total Council Tax bill came to the District Council.

He then explained the financial constraints on this year's budget. The Government grant had increased by only 1.8%. The decision not to increase car park charges would result in reduced income, and the wheeled bin programme would add further expenditure pressure to the budget. There were also other statutory pressures that had to be absorbed. At the beginning of the budget process a £1million budget shortfall had been identified. Various actions had been taken to identify savings; to review the method of buying of goods and services, increasing fees and charges, restructuring of the organisation and avoiding new spending.

He said the Area Panel had the opportunity to influence the process by proposing service reductions, cutting back on planned new expenditure, looking at fees and charges and may be to devolve budgets further to Area Panels. New expenditure could be put forward though savings would need to be made elsewhere in the budget.

Jan Muller, Braintree and Witham Times asked the Leader about increases in fees and charges given the increase in rat infestation and pest control problems in the District. She was advised that there was no charge for dealing with rats as these were regarded as a dangerous pest. But in any event charges would not be raised to an extent that they became a disincentive.

Councillor Gayler said that the figure for the cost of the recycling project didn't take into account the charge that would have been levied on the Council if it had not put in place its recycling programme. Councillor Thawley said that the initiative had been successful and less refuse than expected had gone to landfill sites.

Members were not sure that the questionnaires had been received by Parish Councils and asked officers to check that they had been sent. They also asked that a copy be sent to District Councillors for information.

EP42

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

Melanie Jones, Principle Planning Officer, gave a presentation on the work done so far in producing the Core Strategy Development Plan Document. This was one of the key documents in the new Development Framework for Uttlesford. It would set out the long-term vision and objectives for the district including broad policies for steering and shaping development and identifying broad locations for new housing growth as well as defining areas which should be protected.

This would form part of the consultation document which aimed to identify the issues facing the district and the possible options to meet these. The consultation period would last for 6 weeks from mid/end January.

The first part of the consultation set out a proposed vision for the District up to 2021, objectives for achieving this and then suggested policies to meet those objectives. The Council was seeking views on these and whether there were other objectives and policies which should be included.

The second part of the consultation would set out a number of options that could be used to deliver the housing growth. These options fell into two types: either concentrated growth, in a single or small number of locations; or a more dispersed growth over a larger number of locations. The East of England Plan said that 'No Growth' was not an option.

Melanie Jones said that it was envisaged that sites for approximately 3000 houses would be required. The possible options were as follows.

- Concentrate all development at Saffron Walden
- Concentrate all development at Great Dunmow
- Concentrate all development at Stansted Mountfitchet
- Concentrate development at the largest centres of Great Dunmow, Saffron Walden and Stansted Mountfitchet

- Concentrate development in a single new settlement

Dispersed growth options

- Distribute development over a hierarchy of settlements from villages with services and facilities through key rural centres to largest settlements
- Distribute development along the West Anglia Rail corridor
- Distribute all development in villages around the District
- Distribute development along the A120 corridor and in Dunmow

When the Council had considered all the responses there would be another document for consultation which would present a set of preferred options. This would then be subject to further consultation in the autumn of 2007 and a final submission draft would be sent to the Secretary of State in March 2008. An examination into the soundness of the Core Strategy would take place in September 2008 before it could be finally adopted in 2009.

Mr Smith asked why Great Dunmow had been mentioned here as an option for development, when, at the recent inquiry it had been removed from the East of England Plan. Councillor Cant clarified that Dunmow had been removed because the Government had agreed that the naming of Dunmow had been too specific. However that did not preclude it from taking development in the future and the consultation was looking at every option.

Councillor Murphy hoped that the document would include new proposals that were not developer led. Melanie Jones replied that the consultation document would look at all parts of the district and she hoped that it would bring in new proposals that had not yet been identified.

Councillor Wattebot asked if drainage issues had been considered, also if there would be a policy defining how businesses should be able to expand in cases where there was limited available land. It was confirmed that this was an issue that had been identified.

Councillor Thawley asked how officers had arrived at the figure of 3000 extra homes. He was informed that the total figure set by the Government was 8000 new homes but this had been reduced taking into account permissions already issued and an allowance for new homes already planned. However these figures might well change as there had recently been a change in the rules and homes could not now be counted until the planning permission had been issued.

A Member of the press asked about the suggestion for a new settlement on the Braintree/Dunmow border. She was advised that this was a developer led proposal that had been raised before. The current advice was that a new settlement could not be sustained if a population was less than 10,000.

Melanie Jones said that for this area nothing stood out as the preferred option and officers were not yet in a position to make any recommendations.

Councillor Gayler said that although the East of England plan should be taken into account it was up to local people to come up with ideas. A bottom up approach was required. It was up to councillors to make the decision but in any event it would be made by the new Council after the May elections.

EP43

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT REPORT

The Panel was informed of the community development activities and schemes that officers had been involved in since the previous panel meeting.

It was noted that the Innovations Conference had been cancelled and would be rearranged for a later date.

The meeting ended at 9.00pm