

ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE held at the COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 16 SEPTEMBER 2008 at 7.30 pm

Present: - Councillor S Barker – Chairman
Councillors K R Artus, C A Cant, R H Chamberlain,
C M Dean, J F Cheetham, S J Howell, H J Mason and
A M Wattebot.

Also present:- Councillor D J Morson.

Officers
in attendance: - D Burrige (Director of Operations), S Clarke (Housing
Strategy and Planning Policy Manager), R Harborough
(Acting Director of Development), R Pridham (Head of
Street Services), R Procter (Democratic Services Officer)
and A Webb (Interim Director of Central Services).

E14 PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

A statement was made by Mr John Segar as a resident of Elsenham. A summary of his statement and questions is attached to these Minutes.

E15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S Anjum, A Dean, E Godwin and E Gower.

Councillors Cheetham, C Dean and Wattebot declared a personal interest as bus pass holders.

E16 MINUTES

The Minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 22 April 2008 were approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2008 were approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

E17 LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK TASK GROUP

The Committee received the Minutes of the meeting of the Local Development Framework Task Group held on 5 September 2008. Councillor C Dean said she had a number of questions which followed on from the statement made by Mr Segar, a member of the public. She was very concerned at the slippage in the timetable for the adoption of the Local Development Framework Strategy from April 2009 to May 2011. She asked to what extent the additional technical studies had been known about before, and why a land availability assessment was only now required? She asked when the transport assessments would be made available; and asked to view a traffic

study carried out by David Lock Associates. She asked when the comparative assessment would be completed.

The Chairman asked that these questions be dealt with under the Lead Officer's report (Minute E19 below).

E18

CHAIRMAN'S ITEMS

The Chairman first wished to thank those Members who had attended the Waste Strategy workshop, when an update had been given by Nicola Beech of Essex County Council. A report would come to this Committee in November.

The Chairman then referred to reports in the press about possible options for brown lidded recycling bins. This matter would be considered in further detail by a task group, which would also explore feasibility and costings for smaller caddies.

Thirdly, the Chairman reported that meetings had taken place between this council and the county council regarding revenue and capital support for Uttlesford for recycling. Uttlesford was reaching good levels of recycling at the moment, and a report would be submitted to this Committee in due course.

Councillor Cheetham said she presumed there would be a pilot study into the feasibility of smaller caddies for kitchen waste. She recalled there had been a trial scheme using smaller containers some years ago. The Chairman said that the first step was to assess the economics of introducing a caddie system. She said original pilot schemes had shown fairly high levels of customer satisfaction.

Councillor Cant said it would be wise to carry out pilot studies in both rural and urban settings, as food waste caddies could be knocked over by animals. The Chairman replied that lockable bins were a possible option.

Councillor Artus asked whether sufficient meetings of this Committee had been scheduled, having regard to the need for consideration of the waste strategy and the Crumps Farm application. The Chairman said that a report on the Essex Waste Strategy would be brought to the Committee in November.

Councillor C Dean asked whether there would be a report at the next meeting on the Essex Waste Strategy. The Head of Street Services replied that there would be a report on the Essex Waste Strategy in November and at full Council in December. He added that the strategy had changed little since it had been considered and agreed by Council in 2005.

Councillor Mason said that in towns, a further option was a nominated bin sharing scheme. The Chairman agreed that this and many other options

could be considered by the Task Group, although the sharing of kitchen waste bins involved certain problematic issues.

E19

LEAD OFFICER'S REPORT

The Chairman welcomed the Acting Director of Development as the new lead officer.

Members considered the report of the Acting Director of Development, which gave an update on the following matters: recycling publicity and the Dunmow Town Square project; the government's eco towns initiative; progress on the Local Development Framework core strategy; the East of England Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation EiP; and Essex County Council's proposed sub area studies.

Regarding the Local Development Framework core strategy, and in response to a question raised earlier by Councillor C Dean, the Acting Director of Development said that officers had been aware that additional technical studies would be needed when they had consulted on the preferred options, but their scope and how they would fit into the process had been informed by responses to the consultation, particularly from bodies such as the county council, the Environment Agency and GO East. A substantial amount of work was still to be done, but progress was being made.

In reply to Councillor C Dean's question about the strategic housing assessment, he said that the programme was determined by the joint requirements of the local authority partners.

Regarding the transport study, an initial draft document had been prepared for internal discussion with the Highways Authorities, after which it would be finalised by WSP, the Fairfield Partnership's transport consultants. At that stage it would be published. Work with the County Council was at a less advanced stage, and it was hoped that further meetings would be held over the next few weeks. The Local Development Framework Task Group had noted the extensive amount of work needed, and that the decision had been taken to put resources into completing the technical studies in time to inform the next stage.

Councillor C Dean asked whether the problems collecting from cul de sacs, which had been featured in the press recently, had now stopped. The Chairman said she had made a number of suggestions in a conversation she had had with the individual who had raised this matter, but that he had not contacted her further. She went on to say that she had herself spent a day on the recycling lorries, and had seen how difficult it was to manoeuvre lorries in what were small private roads, rather than highways. She recalled that under the wheeled bin policy it had been agreed that bins should be brought to the edge of the highway or other place decided by the Council. Conditions attached to planning applications now required the provision of a communal area for recycling bins in private drives close to the highway. Liaising directly with people should help to resolve issues if they arose.

Councillor C Dean then referred to the recent controversy caused by comments on eco towns in a leaflet issued by the charity, Shelter. She said she had raised this matter with Shelter's chief executive, and that he had stated there had been no intention to promote the development at any particular location. She added that Shelter had invited Members to attend workshops on this subject during the next week.

Councillor C Dean went on to ask about Member involvement in sub regional studies for the Regional Spatial Strategy review. The Acting Director of Development replied that these were technical studies, and that Members would be involved at an appropriate stage in the review.

Councillor Wattebot questioned how the administration could have chosen the preferred option before all the technical studies had been carried out. The Acting Director of Development replied that these studies were programmed to be undertaken in parallel with other pieces of work but that in the light of the responses to consultation it had become clear what evidence was required before the Council would be in a position to judge whether its proposals were sound. GO East had also made representations regarding more work which would be needed on the implications of different scenarios for the scale of activity at Stansted airport, and determination of the most likely option on which to base the core strategy. The challenge was therefore to dovetail the work with the Stansted G2 Inquiry proofs of evidence, which were expected to be prepared in March 2009.

Councillor Cheetham referred to the public examination of the Regional Spatial Strategy Single Issue Review on planning for gypsy and traveller accommodation in the East of England. She asked whether transit sites were included in the proposals, and whether there had been any indication that the council would need to provide such sites. The Housing Strategy and Planning Policy Manager replied that Essex-wide survey work would ascertain the scale of need, and that this would inform the policy provision for such sites.

The Chairman asked how the transfer of the budget for gypsy and traveller sites from EERA to the Homes and Communities Agency would affect the Regional Spatial Strategy review. The Acting Director of Development said that the Regional Assembly had to demonstrate deliverability and funding to show that it was proposing a sound policy.

The Chairman thanked the Lead Officer for his report.

E20

BUDGET MONITORING – REVENUE EXPENDITURE

The Committee noted the report of the Interim Director of Central Services. It was noted that the budget currently showed a net underspend to the end of August of £138,589 against the profiled budgets for the same period. The report also highlighted areas where budgets varied by more than 10% from the profiled budget. The Chairman asked when it would be necessary to start making preparations for next year's budget. The Interim Director of Central

Services said that he would update the profiling as he went along and that he would start revising the budget in order to take it to Finance and Administration Committee at the end of November or Full Council in December. A draft budget should therefore be available by January 2009.

Members considered the implications arising from the reduction in income from building surveying and from bulky waste revenue. Councillor Cheetham said revenue would have to be found from somewhere or expenditure savings would have to be made. The Acting Director of Development said a cautious approach to expenditure was necessary to be able to manage the uncertainties over income. Building surveying fee income was not following a steady trend. Members also considered the staff vacancy reduction of 5% which was now viewed as too high to be achievable each year, and which was to be reviewed.

Questions were put regarding the status of the waste reduction efficiency grant. The Head of Street Services said this grant scheme was now in its third year, but that it was now not clear how it had been subsumed into the Local Area Agreement. Officers were now trying to ascertain the position with Essex County Council. The Chairman asked for a note to be circulated to Members of the Committee giving clarification.

E21

BUDGET MONITORING – CAPITAL PROGRAMME

The Committee noted the report of the Principal Accountant, providing a mid year update on the capital programme. There were no programme items that were over budget and all items were due to be completed within the current financial year. Details of the capital programme were set out in the appendix to the report.

Following a question about the infrastructure in the Dunmow Eastern sector, the Interim Director of Central Services said that a report on section 106 agreements would be brought before the Performance Select Committee.

In reply to a question from Councillor C Dean, officers replied that the capital costs of replacing trade waste bins would not result in an additional cost to the customer, as hire costs already included an element for the replacement programme.

The Chairman thanked the Interim Director of Central Services.

E22

CONCESSIONARY FARES

The Committee noted the report of the Interim Director of Central Services, providing an update on the concessionary fares scheme. The Chairman welcomed the outcome of the amendments to the scheme following negotiations between partners and providers. The start date was now known to be 6 October 2008, with the core hours to be 9.00 am to midnight Monday to Friday, and any time during weekends and Bank Holidays.

It was noted that the 2008/09 original budget should be sufficient to meet the financial requirements. A refund of £60,000, which had originally been identified for settlement of bus company appeals, would be reserved in a holding account to support the scheme over the coming three years, if necessary.

E23

RURAL EXCELLENCE

The Committee noted the report of the Housing Strategy and Planning Policy Manager.

The Chairman questioned the recommendation of the mentors that a preferred Housing Association/Registered Social Landlord be selected. In the current market conditions it would be better to keep the options open.

There was discussion of the number of parishes completing parish plans following withdrawal of funding. Councillor Artus said that Great Hallingbury Parish Council representatives had encountered a lack of progress following a meeting with the District Council. The Housing Strategy and Planning Policy Manager said that the District Council was very keen to support parishes which expressed an interest in affordable housing, and that a further meeting would be arranged.

Councillor Cheetham asked about progress in rolling out the arrangements for meeting local housing need through section 106 agreements, as the pilot scheme for Priors Green in Takeley had been a great success. The Housing Strategy and Planning Policy Manager agreed that this had been a successful pilot and that officers were looking at a second phase. Councillor Cheetham said it was important that a local connection would be a requirement in perpetuity for affordable housing.

Councillor Wattebot was concerned that provision be made for those with special needs, such as respite accommodation, as this was not taken into account in assessing affordable housing needs. The Chairman said that this issue had not formed part of the rural excellence project, but that options for such accommodation were a possibility in certain schemes.

Councillor C Dean said she endorsed the affordable housing scheme at Takeley, and asked when such a scheme would be rolled out to Stansted. She was concerned about the recent suggestion put forward by the homelessness charity Shelter that the construction of an eco-town would provide for the homeless of other districts. Whilst it was right that there should be provision for housing, it should not be allocated all in one place. She asked whether a rebuttal to that suggestion would be sent. The Chairman said that it was not necessary to respond to promotional literature.

Discussion took place on the cost of affordable housing units, and the implications of the Code for Sustainable Homes. Some schemes had been delayed due to lack of Housing Corporation funding. The Chairman said that this was why she was concerned about becoming tied to a preferred partner,

and asked officers to lobby the Corporation, as rural housing was an expensive form of housing to provide.

Councillor Cheetham said homes should be built to last a lifetime, as this would pay off in the end. She too was annoyed at the promotion by Shelter of the eco-town proposal at Elsenham, and had raised the matter with the Chief Executive. The Acting Director of Development said that the Council's draft response to the DCLG on the draft Planning Policy Statement on eco-towns which was currently being formulated could address the points raised by Shelter.

E24 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED that under Section 100(l) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded for the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 3 and 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of that Act.

E25 PARKING PARTNERSHIP

The Director of Operations presented a report, and gave a detailed verbal summary of the background to the proposals. The measures recommended would enable officers to start work on options to address short-term financial and resilience issues and to make improvements in performance and efficiency.

The Chairman thanked the Director of Operations for her report, which she commended as an excellent initiative. Councillor C Dean said this was an excellent report, which she too welcomed. Members then discussed various aspects of the proposals, and it was

RESOLVED to approve in principle the establishment of a parking partnership, as described in option B of the appendix to the report, together with all associated actions as recommended at paragraph 2 of the report.

The meeting ended at 9.20 pm.

STATEMENT BY A MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC

John Segar

John Segar, a resident of Elsenham, made the following statement about the proposals for development between Elsenham and Henham.

Local Development Framework and eco-town proposals

Mr Segar said he wished to raise the whole issue of the eco town proposals and the preferred option for development under the Local Development Framework. He referred to public opposition to eco town proposals for Hanley Grange, and the apparent demise of those proposals following withdrawal of the landowner's assent. He said that Councillors had been much quieter on the subject of the proposals for Elsenham, and hoped they would show equal concern here.

Mr Segar said he was concerned about the serious impact development would have on the area around Elsenham, particularly with regard to water supply and traffic congestion. He referred to a recent statement by Sir Alan Haselhurst MP regarding flaws in the plans for Hanley Grange, and trusted that the same criticism would be taken to apply to the Fairfield proposals for Elsenham. He said that the proposals should not describe the development as a new town, as it was an existing settlement. He wished to remind Councillors of the longstanding problem of water supply to this area; and the difficulties increased transport would cause. He referred to calculations in a transport study carried out by Uttlesford in 1988 which had concluded that an additional 380 houses in Elsenham were inappropriate development. He had calculated that if such criteria were applied to the current proposals there would be an unacceptable increase in traffic movements. He concluded that both the eco town plans and option 4 proposals should be dismissed, as Elsenham was an unsuitable site for development.

Mr Segar then asked why there had been nine months' delay in the process for option 4 to be determined, and wondered if this was due to inefficiency on the part of the Council or unwillingness to release factual information?