

ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 10 NOVEMBER 2009 at 7.30 pm

Present: Councillor S Barker – Chairman.
Councillors K R Artus, C A Cant, R H Chamberlain, J F Cheetham, C D Down, E J Godwin, E J Hicks, S J Howell, H J Mason, R D Sherer and A M Wattebot.

Also present: Councillor A J Ketteridge.

Officers in attendance: D Burrige (Director of Operations), M Cox (Democratic Services Officer), R Harborough (Director of Development), M Perry (Assistant Chief Executive), R Pridham (Head of Street Services) and J Roos (Energy Efficiency Surveyor).

E22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C M Dean, C C Smith and A C Yarwood.

Councillor Barker declared a personal interest as a member of Essex County Council and the EERA Housing Panel.

Councillors Mason and Ketteridge declared a personal interest as a member of Saffron Walden Town Council.

E23 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2009 were approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

E24 BUSINESS ARISING

i) Minute E13 (i) – RSS Single Issue Review- gypsy and traveller pitch provision.

It was reported that Councillors Cheetham and Chamberlain would be attending the meetings to discuss the provision of gypsy and traveller pitches.

ii) Minute E15 - Local Development Framework

Officers were investigating a suitable process to communicate with parish councils about council consultations.

iii) Minute E20 – Stansted Airport Draft Joint Action Plan

The Council's submission had been sent in following consultation with Members and STAAP.

E25

CHAIRMAN'S ITEMS

The Chairman gave a brief update on items, as follows.

There would be a further LDF workshop on 19 November and the extraordinary meeting of the Committee would be held on 24 November. All members of the Council would be invited to attend this meeting.

The IAA Agreement had now been signed and Essex County Council had been successful in its bid for PFI credits from Central Government. It would now undertake a tender process to procure the facilities.

Officers would be looking at caravan parking and parking overnight at Swan Meadow car park, at the request of Councillor Walters.

In respect of the gypsy site at Little Hallingbury the case had been heard by the Circuit Judge at Cambridge County Court on 20 October and had been adjourned to February 11 to allow the travellers more time to prepare their case. The temporary injunction was no longer in force but an assurance had been given that no additional caravans, mobile homes or vehicles would be brought onto the site before the hearing on 11 February.

E26

LEAD OFFICER'S REPORT

The Director of Development presented his report as Lead Officer, updating the Committee on Saffron Walden Castle, White Street car park lighting, the Climate Change Working Group, insulation and renewable grant schemes, Heat seekers and Golds Nurseries.

E27

TRANSFER OF BRIDGE END GARDENS TO SAFFRON WALDEN TOWN COUNCIL

At the last meeting the Committee had agreed to the principle of the transfer of Bridge End Gardens to the Town Council, subject to further information on the legal agreement in relation to the statues, opening hours and maintenance plan. The report set out answers to these points and also included a copy of the report by the Restoration Manager, which gave a detailed inventory and set out the current condition of the garden. The report made a number of recommendations as to future work in the Gardens and it was hoped that this would be taken into account by the Town Council.

Members were advised that the land should be handed over intact and anything included in the land at the time of transfer would belong to the landowner, which would include the statues. Any removal of items from the Garden would require the consent of the freeholder.

There was some discussion about how to ensure the future maintenance of the Garden. Members said that there were only a few years to go on the 10 year plan and asked if they could request that another plan be prepared. Other members said that maintenance of the gardens would be the responsibility of the Town Council and it already had a proven record regarding the custodian of local amenities and heritage. The Town Council had the civic pride to maintain the Gardens and two gardeners to carry out the maintenance work would transfer.

It was considered reasonable for the District Council to ask for some feedback during the period of tapered funding. It was suggested that Councillor Morson continue as representative on the Friends of Bridge End Gardens and that the Town Council be asked to provide an annual report to the Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED that

- 1 Members recommend to Finance and Administration Committee the assignment of the lease and transfer of responsibility for Bridge End Garden and respective equipment, materials and assets to Saffron Walden Town Council on tapering funding of up to 5 years as part of the package of Saffron Walden amenities already determined.
- 2 Saffron Walden Town Council be asked to give serious consideration to the recommendations made in the Appraisal Report.
- 3 For the duration of the tapered funding an Annual report be made to the Scrutiny Committee.
- 4 The Committee's formal thanks be conveyed to John Bosworth, the Restoration Manager for all the work he had undertaken in connection with the Gardens.

E28

CONSULTATION ON EAST OF ENGLAND PLAN

The Committee received details of the consultation document produced by EERA on the review of the East of England plan extension to 2031. The consultation invited views on whether the vision, objectives and policies on the current approved plan should be updated and set out four growth scenarios for a range of housing and job growth targets.

Scenario 1 was for a roll forward of the existing plan (430 homes a year for Uttlesford). Scenario 2 – based on a regional scale settlement study on the potential for new expanded towns and identified a site south of A120/west of Braintree (1,080 homes), scenario 3 – based on the economic potential to create more jobs (430 homes), scenario 4 - based on national household projections (350 homes).

In response, the County Council had commissioned a consultant to consider all aspects of the plan and to produce a joint statement on behalf of the Essex districts. The response expressed a number of concerns with the assumptions in the plan and with all four scenarios for growth. It said that scenario 1 would be the maximum acceptable scale of growth, the others were unrealistic, unsustainable and not capable of delivery.

The District Council was also invited to submit its own response on the growth scenarios. It was agreed that the comments should focus on option 2 as this would be the most detrimental to Uttlesford. The following points were expressed by the Committee and would be included in the response:-

- Scenario 2 is unrealistic;
- The district has no natural focus for growth;
- The projected growth is based on a scenario for growth at Stansted airport that is not realistic;
- Serious delivery problems could be anticipated if this scenario were to be pursued;
- The unique environmental and historic character of the district should be emphasised;
- The District does not have the infrastructure to support the number of houses proposed in the new plan period;
- The rural nature of the area, which comprises many B roads and rural lanes should be emphasised;
- The location of the district in relation to river systems places constraints on the ability to discharge treated effluent without compromising water quality;
- The rate of natural change in the District is low;
- The employment growth scenario that would be needed to justify the proposed growth would be contrived;
- The District Council considers that even the lowest projections are too high;
- The deadline of the end of March 2010 set for the process of preparing a draft Plan has resulted in compression of the study and consultation processes, which has compromised their robustness.

RESOLVED that the Committee supports the Local Authorities Joint Policy Response in its formal submission to the EERA review of the East of England Plan to 2031, and also submits a District Council response to the review on the issues identified above.

OUTSOURCING THE CARBON MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME FOR THE COUNCIL ESTATE

The Committee was informed that the Council had a corporate priority to reduce its carbon footprint by 25% over 5 years. For the last two years a 8.6% saving had been achieved. The programme had been run in house by the Council's Energy Efficiency Officer but progress had been limited by available staff resource.

The Energy Efficiency Officer would shortly be leaving the Council and thought had been given to an alternative way of providing the service through an outsourcing energy saving contract model. This would involve a one off capital investment, including management costs and profit margin in return for a package of carbon reduction saving projects rapidly implemented and a certain level of energy savings guaranteed. If consumption went above the agreed savings level the service provider would compensate the Council and take corrective action.

A business case for the model had been prepared by a consultant and initial estimates were that for a total investment of £385K, £41K of annual savings and a 10-15% of carbon emissions reduction could be achieved. The Committee was now asked for authority to procure this service.

Members had a number of concerns with the proposal; that there were too many variables and assumptions in the figures, and a too small margin for error. They also questioned the terms and conditions of the procurement and how the guarantees would be structured.

Councillor Howell could not endorse this proposal. He said that the Council already had a good record with regards to its carbon footprint and the initial savings of 10% already achieved were a credit to officers. The 25% target was gesture politics and could only be achieved by borrowing money at a time when Council finances were under pressure. He questioned the robustness of the business case which appeared to relying on an increase in revenue with costs remaining the same.

Councillor Chamberlain expressed concerns about the proposal in relation to the Housing Revenue Account and Capital Programme as these would be under pressure in the next few years.

The Committee was informed that there had been a careful financial appraisal of the proposal and the report had been endorsed by the Council's Management Team. The figures provided were estimates and more detailed figures would be produced once the procurement process had been undertaken.

Members said that this was a complex report and whilst not against the principle, would welcome a more detailed explanation of the figures by finance officers before a decision was taken.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the Council further explore the procurement of an outsourced carbon management service which includes the features of upfront investment, rapid implementation and a guaranteed level of savings, subject to further details on the procurement arrangements including the contract and guarantee structure.
- 2 a Member workshop be held on this issue and a further report be made to the Council meeting on 15 December 2009.

E30

USE OF FLEET DIESAL AND HEATING OIL

Further to the last meeting the Director of Operations gave an update on the 2008/09 figures in relation to diesel fuel and heating oil usage. The sum reported for diesel usage at the last meeting had incorrectly been interpreted to be reporting a loss rather than a collective figure reporting a number of necessary adjustments. The report explained the details of these and it was noted that the unallocated fuel for the year was now estimated to be 1.5%. In relation to fuel at the Leaden Roding Sheltered complex this had remained high as the boilers still served residents in the adjoining properties and communal and office areas of the complex.

Councillor Cant asked if she could be provided with the figures for 2009/10 to date. Members thought it would be useful for there to be an internal audit report on this area of activity.

RESOLVED that the Committee note the report and that an Internal Audit be undertaken on this area.

The meeting ended at 10.00 pm

